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Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death-Hole Hustle.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.



"KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, OR BY THE HORNED HORNETS OF STINGTOWN IF I DON'T BORE SOMEBODY."

H. W. PRAY,
Norwood, R. I.

Deadwood Dick's Death-Hole Hustle;

OR,

THE DOOM OF SATAN'S SEVEN.

BY E. L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF THE "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS.

CHAPTER I.

PLENTY OF FUN IN THE HORN OF PLENTY.
DEMING, New Mexico.

A peerless night in that land of peerless sunshine.

Two passengers have just alighted from the incoming train on the Southern Pacific.

One of these is a handsome young man of twenty-two, with black hair and magnetic, flashing eyes. He is well dressed, sporting a high hat.

His companion—the two are pards—is a bearded man of forty, as homely as can be imagined, wearing a long frock coat. His hat is the well-known broadbrim slouch, a hat never out of style.

These men might have escaped with but passing notice from the crowd, but for one striking peculiarity of the man last described—on his right shoulder was perched a parrot!

This was so unusual a sight that everybody stopped to gaze at the bird and its master, as well as at the younger man.

"Well, Mose, which way do we truck?"

So asked he of the parrot, when the train had pulled out and was once more on its way.

"Hardly know, Pete," was the response.

"We want to find a roost the first of all, I suppose; some place to call home while we're here."

"You bet!" chimed in the parrot, whereat everybody laughed.

This was something entirely new and novel, even in that fly town of strange delights.

"You know a thing or two, don't ye, Polly?" remarked the homely man who carried the bird.

"Polly wants drink! Polly wants booze!"

If the crowd had laughed before, they fairly howled now.

"Want booze, do ye, Polly?" the homely man repeated, twisting his head to get a full view of the bird.

"You bet!"

"All right, you shall have it, if there's a booze-mill in town."

"Bully Pete! Polly paint town red; ha, ha, ha!"

Nearly everybody at the station had crowded around, by this time, and the roar of laughter that went up when the parrot said this, was enough to bring out the whole town.

"Whar's your nearest dispensary, neighbors?" the homely man made inquiry.

"Right around the corner, stranger," one man made answer. "You'll see ther sign; can't miss et ef ye ain't stone blind."

"All right, pard; we'll find et, you bet. Come along, Moses, me boy! I want to wash down the cinders that's lodged in my throat."

"I'm with you," the younger man agreed, and pushing their way out of the throng, they passed up the street, a great number of the crowd following them.

Turning the corner, the first thing to strike their notice was a huge gilt horn, over the door of a well lighted saloon, and the name on a sign prominently displayed was—

THE HORN OF PLENTY.

"That's the kind of a horn we are after, hey, Polly?" the man with the bird laughingly suggested.

"You bet!" the parrot promptly croaked.

This saloon was the leading place of the kind in Deming, and was kept by a man named Murray.

Murray was a big, round-shouldered fellow with a fat face, and went by the nickname of Merry Murray, for he was always smiling, and his pleasant smile won custom for his place.

The new-comers entered in an easy way, as though well accustomed to the role of strangers in a strange place.

They stepped to the bar, and the homely, bearded man called for drinks.

A couple of glasses were set out, and a bottle.

"Me too!" croaked the parrot on the elder man's shoulder.

Merry Murray started back, looking at the bird with astonishment, and for the moment his smile deserted him.

"Did that bird talk?" he gasped.

"You bet!"

Polly herself gave the answer.

"Well, I'm blowed!" Murray exclaimed. "Does ther darn thing really drink, stranger?"

"Polly wants drink! Polly wants booze! Set 'em up fer Polly!" promptly ordered the bird.

"Put out another glass, pardner," the homely man directed. "The bird has got ter have some, or thar will be a sarcus hyer."

"Bet yer life on't!"

Everybody in the place was on their feet, and all pushed nearer to the bar to see what was going on.

The proprietor obeyed the order, and another glass was set out, and when the bearded man had poured for himself and pard, he also poured for the parrot.

The bird sprung down from his shoulder, and diving its head into the glass, began to gulp the fiery stuff with great gusto.

"Hyar, ye darn glutton, don't drink all that!" the homely man suddenly ordered, and he jerked the bird's head out of the glass. "You'll be drunker'n a b'iled owl before ye know et."

"Polly wants more!"

"Well, Polly won't git no more now, you kin bet! You hev hed enough. You go ter bed fer a spell, now, an' take a snooze."

With that he took the bird and poked it down into one of the capacious pockets of his coat.

The crowd laughed heartily, and Merry Murray asked.

"What'll ye take fer that bird, stranger?"

"Et ain't fer sale."

"I'll give ye a clean hundred dollars fer et."

"A clean thousand won't buy et, so et ain't no use ter offer. Hyer's ther ante fer ther stuff," and he flipped a coin upon the bar.

"I'd like ter have et," ther proprietor remarked, as he made change. "Where do ye hail from, gents?"

"We've drifted down from Montana way."

"Any harm ter ask yer names?"

"Not a bit; I'm Pete Parrot, which title I lay claim to by right o' bein' born into ther Parrot fambly when I was young. My pard hyer is Moses Mantell, young an' bashful, as ye see. He's better known as Magic Mose."

"Magic Mose?"

"That was what I said."

"Magic in tossin' off his booze?"

Mose now spoke for himself.

"If you took less of it yourself, old man," he remarked, "you wouldn't have snakes creeping around in plain sight."

Just as he spoke, Merry Murray gave a yell and a start, and made a frantic grab at the back of his neck, flinging a live and wriggling snake half way across the room.

"Great Goshen!" he cried. "Whar did that come from?"

"Look to home before you talk about

booze any more," advised Magic Mose, in a quiet way.

The laugh was against Merry Murray.

"Do you mean to tell me that was a trick?" he demanded.

"If you'll now take that toad out of your bosom, maybe you will think theres no trick about it."

There was anything but a smile on the face of the proprietor now, and he clapped his hand to his shirt-front, grabbing something which he held away from his body with one hand, while with the other he tore his shirt open.

"Snakes and toads!" he roared, as he flung a toad out upon the floor to keep company with the snake. "If *this* is your magic, young man, don't play no more of it on *me*, fer the luv ov goodness!"

The crowd roared.

"Whar did them critters go to, anyhow?" demanded one fellow, who was looking around on the floor to find them, as were several others.

"Why, they're in your hat, sir."

"Helen Blazes!"

Whether this Helen was a former sweetheart, or a tartar of a wife from whom he had taken French leave at some time or other, let us not stop to inquire; but he snatched off his hat frantically as he mentioned her name, and dropped the snake and the toad together.

Now there was excitement, sure enough.

"But whar the deuce did they go to?" yelled another fellow, who had made a jump to get out of their way as they dropped.

"I'll bet drinks for the house they are in your right boot," spoke Magic Mose, in his quiet way.

"In my boot?"

"Exactly."

"Git out! Wouldn't I feel 'em ef they was thar?"

"You might and you might not; many a man has had snakes in his boots that he didn't feel."

The crowd laughed afresh, but this man was rather pale, and was trying his foot around in his right stogy to learn whether there really was anything there or not, and he certainly couldn't feel anything.

"What do ye say?" Mose demanded.

"Let me warn ye that Mosey never makes a mistake in a bet of this hyer kind," spoke up Parrot Pete.

He was called Pete Parrot, or Parrot Pete, just as it happened.

"Take off yer boot an' see, Towser," some one sung out to the fellow who was in the unhappy quandary at the moment.

"No, I ber darn ef I wull," Towser growled. "I guess I'd orter know whether I hev got anything in me boot or not, hadn't I? Ye ain't goin' ter make no fool out o' Towser Terrel ef he knows et."

"They sartainly ain't on ther floor, anyhow," apprised another fellow who had taken a good survey around.

"Are you quite sure they are not in your boot?" asked Mose.

"Sure I am sure; don't ye s'pose I know?"

"Then off with your boot and win."

"That's what's the matter!" shouted one old toper of the place; "we want ther proof, fer et means a free flowin' o' bug-juice fer us, either way."

Seeing it in this light, the crowd set up a howl for the proof.

"Off with that 'ar boot, Towser," was the cry, "or we'll take et off fer ye. Ef ye know ther critters ain't in et, you ar' safe, anyhow. Off with et!"

"Wull, hang et, ef ye ar' bound ter make a fool of me, hyer goes; but I warn ye, Mister Moses, ef I take off my boot fer nothin' I'm goin' ter bu'st yer eye fer ye, an' ef ther snake an' toad ar' in et I'll perform ther same deed anyhow."

"Well, that will be something else when we get that far down on the program," re-

joined the gentle-looking Magic Mose. "As your partner there has remarked, the snake and toad are certainly gone, and if they are not in your boot I don't know where they are."

"An' et's drinks fer us all, ary way!" yelled the bummer.

"Count me in!" here sung out the parrot, poking its head out of Pete's pocket at that moment. "Polly on hand, you bet!"

This fairly brought down the house, and while the parrot climbed out of her master's pocket by means of her beak, and mounted to her place on his shoulder, Towser Terrel sat down to remove his boot.

CHAPTER II.

MAGIC MOSE FLOORS A BULLWHACK.

THIS Towser Terrel was one of the toughs of the town.

He was accounted a particularly bad man, and it was said of him that he had several notches in his tent-pole for men killed.

Be that as it might, he was known to be a hard customer in a fight, and his threat respecting Magic Mose was not an idle one by any means, as those who knew the man were well aware.

Seating himself upon a stool, he flung up his right foot, grabbed his stogy with both hands, and pulled.

The boot was a stiff, ungainly piece of foot-furniture, and it required considerable of muscle to get it off, but it came off at last with a suddenness that almost toppled Mr. Terrel off the stool.

He looked into the boot, as soon as he recovered, and cried out:

"Thar, blame et, I knowed thar was nothin' in et; I'll fix you out, younker, as soon as I git this boot on again."

"But, shake it," directed Magic Mose. "I'm not going to take your bare word for it; I want to see the proof. Shake the boot, and if the snake and toad don't come out, I'll take water."

"You'll take more'n water, blast ye!"

Towser Terrel felt that he was the laughing-stock of the crowd, and his choler was rapidly rising.

He gave the boot a shaking, top downward, and greatly to his surprise, out came the snake and toad together, as full of life as they had ever been, and he stared at them as though he had the jams.

The crowd, too, could not conceal their amazement.

"Thet 'ar war done fine, hang me ef it wasn't," remarked one man, whose eyes fairly bulged.

"You ar' right et was," agreed Merry Murray. "What will ye take, boys? It is Towser Terrel's set-up, ye know; ha, ha, ha!"

"Booze fer me!" chirped the parrot, promptly.

"Towser Terrel's set-up, ar' et?" yelled that individual, now flushed with rage. "We'll see 'bout that, I opine," as he yanked on his boot again. "I think I promised you a lickin', young feller."

He leaped to his feet, confronting Magic Mose savagely.

"Better go slow, Mister Man!" warned Pete Parrot, speaking earnestly.

"You bet!" cried Poll.

"Shut your head!" the fellow savagely ordered, to Pete. "Say two words, and I'll lick the pair of ye."

"Wull, now," drawled Pete, "that 'ar might be somethin' of a contract, 'fore ye got done wi' et. Mebby you will bite off all ye kin chaw, in Moses hyer; mebby ye wull."

"I don't want to fight you, sir," Magic Mose declared, backing away.

"No, I reckon ye don't; et won't be no fight, et won't; I'm merely goin' ter spank ye fer yer darn freshness, that's all."

"I wouldn't try it, if I were you."

"Ye wouldn't, hey?"

"No."

"An' why wouldn't ye?"

"My pard there has just told you the reason."

"An' that ain't no reason a tall, et ain't; peel off yer coat an' git ready."

"I don't feel inclined to do that; I don't want to fight. I'll treat the house myself, if you want to back out."

"Ha, ha, ha! I think you said somethin' about takin' water a bit ago, an' et looks as ef ye ar' takin' et in ther biggest kind o' gulps. Peel that ar' coat, now, or I'll take ye as year'."

"You had better shake some of the sawdust out of your clothes before you talk fight so strong."

"Sawdust in my clothes!"

"Yes; you are made of sawdust, anyhow, or look to be."

"I am, hey? Wull, I'll make you think I'm more'n sawdust, I reckon; you'll swear I'm a steam sawmill, when I git done!"

With that he flung off his coat, and as he did so a great quantity of sawdust went flying in every direction, greatly to his amaze and greatly to the amusement of the crowd.

"Cuss ye!" he snarled. "I'll take the funny tricks out of ye!"

He made a leap forward, and aimed a blow at the nose of Magic Mose, but the said nose wasn't there when the fist arrived.

The force of the blow carried Towser forward a step or two, and when he recovered he was ten times more enraged than before, and those who knew him best saw blood in his eye.

"What are you doing *there*?" asked Mose.

"*Here* I am, Bow-wow!"

"*Yar-r-rh!*" snarled Towser. "What's that ye call me? Do ye take me fer a dog, blast ye?"

"You've got a dog's name, anyhow, and it slipped me for a moment, so I came as near to it as I could at first guess. Hadn't you better go take a walk and cool off, don't you think?"

"I'm goin' to cool *you* off, that's what I'm goin' ter do!"

"Well, if you are bound to have trouble, sail in, then. I'll do my little best for you."

A space had been cleared, in the middle of the room, and Magic Mose and this man Towser found themselves in the midst of the crowd, a ring formed around them in the approved style.

On one side stood Pete Parrot, on the alert to see that his more youthful pard came to no harm through treachery.

"Trouble is jest what I am bound ter have," whooped Mr. Towser. "I'm goin' to take some of ther consait out of your breeches fer ye, ye cussed little banty, ye! I am goin' ter wollop ye in a way that will make ye think yer granddaddy has come ter life armed wi' a eudgel."

He made another leap and another blow.

This time he found Magic Mose, but not in a way he had looked for.

Mose dropped slightly, allowing the bully's arm to pass over his shoulder; then, with the same motion, as it seemed, his own left shot out, straight from the shoulder, taking Towser fairly in the left eye, and over Towser went like a tenpin, making the windows rattle when he came down on his back.

The cheer that went up was deafening, almost.

It was the first time the terror of Deming had ever been floored in this fashion.

"Look out fer him now, boyce!" a warning voice gave notice. "He will murder ye, ef ye give him haff a show ter do et; he's a bad man, he is, cl'ar through an' through, when he's riled."

"I'll watch out for him," Mose quietly rejoined.

Towser was making the dust of the floor fly, as he scrambled to regain his feet, and as he came up he was reaching for a weapon.

"Hold on, thar!" cried out Pete Parrot,

and he leveled a brace of revolvers at the fellow. "Ef you draw a gun, by ther 'tarnel ef I don't make a mammoth excavation in yer in'ards that'll make ye think ye've lost somethin'!"

"You bet!" chipped in Poll. "Shoot head off!"

The baffled bullwhacker promptly checked himself in the act of drawing his gun, and glared at the homely pard of Magic Mose with the eye he still had in service, for the light seemed to have gone out in the one Mose had hit.

"What's this hyer ter do wi' *you*?" he growled.

"A mighty sight," was the response. "Mosey hyer is my tender pard, an' I'm his legal an' 'pinted guardian, so ter say, 'pinted by himself, an' nobody is goin' ter wring in a cold deck on his deal, you kin bet. Drop that ar' gun, now, or I'll do ther same fer you."

There was no way out of it, so Towser brought his hand around in front in plain sight.

"Have you had enough, sir?" asked Magic Mose.

"I didn't set out ter fight ther hull town," the bullwhacker growled.

"You offered to whip both me and my pard, only a few minutes ago; seem to have changed your mind about that."

"He's no good!" croaked the parrot. "No good! Ha, ha!"

"Blast *you*!" grated the exasperated Towser, and he made a reach for the bird with the good intention of wringing its neck.

The parrot, however, simply flung itself over backward, yet holding on with its sharp claws, and began to flap its wings and screech in a way that fairly startled the man.

"Hands off!" ordered Parrot Pete. "You tetch that 'ar bird, an' by ther horned hornets of Stingtown ef I don't close up yer other eye fer ye. We didn't come in hyer to git into trouble, but et seems we have, an' you kin bet we ar' able to git out again."

"Sock it to him!" screamed Poll.

"You couldn't do et, in a fair fight, ye couldn't" retorted Towser.

"Mosey hyer has done et himself," reminded Pete. "Ef ye ain't satisfied with ther job, let him finish et, that's all."

"I'll 'tend ter him another time, blast him! I hit my eye on ther leg of a table, when I tripped an' fell that time, an' I ain't in trim fer any more jest now. I will settle ther score, though, all ther same."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Parrot Pete, and all the others joined him. "Why, you blamed idiot, it was ther fist of Mose that put ther blinder on yer eye, that's what et was. A poor excuse is better'n none, howsumever. Then ye call et quits for this time, do ye?"

"Yes, fer this time; but, mark et, youngster, you will never leave Deming alive; I swear et."

"I'll take chances of that," laughed Mose, lightly.

"You'll see."

With that, and a fierce glint at the good-looking young stranger with his one available eye, the fellow started for the door.

"Say, hold on!" Mose called after him.

"You have forgotten something."

"Wull, what hev I furgot?" stopping.

"The snake and toad."

In the excitement, these had been forgotten by all.

Now everybody looked around for them, but they were not to be seen nowhere, and every eye settled upon Towser.

"Don't steal ther critters!" sung out the bummer, who had been disappointed of his chance to liquidate. "You ar' purty mean, Towser, but I didn't think you'd be so cussed mean as ter steal toads an' snakes."

"You shut up, or I'll bore ye! What do ye mean by sayin' I hev fergot ther toad an' snake, young feller? Mebbe ye will say they ar' in me boot again. Ef they are, I'll walk ther life out of 'em, I warn ye. Ye'll never play ther snake an' toad on nobody else."

"They are not in your boot, sir, but in your hat."

With a yell, evidently feeling them at that very moment, the fellow jerked off his head-gear, and, sure enough, out fell the toad and snake, as lively as ever, greatly to the delight of all assembled.

"Curse ye, I'll git square wi' ye fer this," Towser growled, shaking his fist at Magic Mose. "I'll see yer heart 'fore ye ar' ten days older—I swear et!"

"Take good keer that Mosey don't have yer own out an' on exerbishun," warned Parrot Pete.

"That's what's the matter!" sung out Polly. "Ha, ha, ha!"

But, Towser Terrel was gone.

"Young feller, that was the cleanest knock-down I ever seen," complimented the proprietor of the place, then. "Et done me more good 'n big a dinner. I don't begrudge the house a drink on that, an' I'll set 'em up myself."

"Bully boy!" cried the parrot, promptly.

"You kin bet yer beak he is, Polly," agreed Booze, the old bum, who was the first at the bar.

"But, what about the snake and toad?" one man asked. "Thar they go, wigglin' an' hoppin', as though they'd lost somebody."

"Ah! sure enough," said Mose, as though he had forgotten them. "I'll dispose of them; I'll make them eat each other, and so do away with them. Here, you two!"

He snapped his fingers, and the snake and toad stopped short and looked up at him.

"Come here, you rascals!"

And they came!

When they reached his feet, Mose picked them up and placed them on the bar, in plain sight of all, and commanded:

"Now, snake, you swallow the toad, and then proceed to swallow yourself, or I'll swallow both of you; and if I have to do that it will be all up with you. Now, then, proceed to business."

Immediately the snake made a snap at the toad, and his toadship was not; it had disappeared; and turning then, upon itself, the snake made a twist or two and it, too, was gone, to the utter, complete and paralyzing amazement of all who had beheld the trick.

Exclamations of wonder were heard on every hand, but the crowd soon gave its attention to the treat that had been offered by Murray, after which Pete Parrot and Magic Mose took their leave of the Horn of Plenty and set forth in quest of quarters for the night.

Both were agreed on one point, that they had struck a mighty lively town.

CHAPTER III.

POLL AND PETE MISSING. MOSE IN TROUBLE.

THE United States Hotel was at this time the leading place of the kind in the young and thriving city.

However, the two pards were not high-toned, and a more humble inn would answer their purpose quite as well, and suit their purse a good deal better, so they sought a smaller house.

Here they registered as Moses Mantell and Pete Parrot, and were shown to a comfortable room.

That is to say, after they had first played havoc with a supper.

"Well, Pete, here we are," remarked Mose, when they had closed the door of their room and had kicked off their boots.

"Yes, hyer we aire, Dick, in ther camp of the enemy, but we haven't sighted our game yet. But, we couldn't hardly expect to, in so short a time, could we?"

"That's so, Pete."

"But, we have succeeded in makin' a foe. Wonder ef thar's anything in the threats the galoot made?"

"Hard to tell, Pete. He's got it in for me, I don't doubt, but I'll have a sharp eye out for him, and if he tries any funny work on with me I'll give him a dose of lead that he won't digest in a hurry."

"An' serve him right, too. But, let's bunk, and take a fresh holt in ther mornin'."

So they "bunked," tired from their long travel.

When Magic Mose awoke, it was with a start.

A light was glaring in his eyes, and he found himself looking straight into the tube of a six-shooter!

Back of the weapon was a masked face, and back of that several more of the same, one of the maskers holding a bull's-eye that was nearly blinding their surprised prisoner.

"Don't you say peep!" was the whispered warning. "If ye do, it will be the last peep you'll ever make in this world. Git up and dress yerself."

Mose had already noticed that Pete Parrot was gone!

Without a word, knowing that it would be useless, Mose slipped out of the bed and proceeded to put himself into his clothes with prompt dispatch.

His captors stood around waiting while he dressed, and as soon as he had done so, the man with the revolver said:

"Now, follow us, and at the least sign of trying to balk, or the least word from your lips, you will die so sudden that you will never know what hit you. Don't ye forget what I say."

Magic Mose nodded, and was ready.

He had noted that his weapons had been taken from his clothes, and he was about helpless.

And he wondered what had become of Pete Parrot, and how he had gotten out of the bed and out of the room without waking him.

Mose expected to be taken from the room by the regular door, of course, but he soon found out his mistake in this. The way of exit was to be by way of one of the windows.

There were three of these windows in the room, two in the front and one on the side, or so it had been supposed, from their appearance, but now the one at the side of the room proved to be only a sham; the drawn curtain really hiding a door that had been made to represent a window.

This curtain one of the maskers now pulled aside, and a push parted the seeming window, and a flight of descending stairs was revealed.

Down this the way was led, a couple of the maskers going before, then Mose, and the other three following.

There were five in all, if he had counted straight.

It was a narrow passage, seeming to be built between two walls, and at the bottom the way was blocked by a heavy door.

This was readily opened.

Another passage was beyond, and into this they filed, the last man closing the door after them, and here they continued on for a considerable distance.

At last another door was reached, which was opened like the first, and they came out into a low, square room of considerable size, which was almost destitute of furniture.

When the door had been closed, it looked like all the rest of the wall, and not a break was to be seen on any side.

Magic Mose could not but wonder where he was.

In the center of the room was a single hanging lamp, and when the company had gathered under this, with their prisoner in the midst, the leader said:

"Now, sir, you may speak. You can shout, if you want to, but I'll tell you at once it will only be a waste of breath. We have disarmed you, as you must be aware—"

"So I found, when I reached for a gun in the room, when you told me to dress myself."

"We had taken care of that, you see. And having disarmed you, we have not taken the trouble to confine your hands, for you are harmless here. Now, sir, give a straight account of yourself."

"All right; I'm a freeborn American cit, of full age, of white persuasion, and with as good a claim upon the—"

"Bosh! We don't care whether you are Chinese, Injun, or what."

"Then what did you ask for?"

"We want to know what brought you here to this town of Deming, that is all we are after."

"What brought me here? I came in on the train—"

"Now you look here, if you try to be funny you will find there is no fun in it. What business brought you here? What did you come here for?"

"If I answer your questions, will you answer mine?"

"We don't promise."

"Then I don't answer."

"What do you want to know?"

"I want to know what became of my pard."

"Ha! is that all? Well, he has been taken care of, the same as you are likely to be."

"How fashion, for instance?"

"Curse you! let up on your nonsense and answer my question!"

"If I did, and told you the truth, you wouldn't believe me, so what's the use of it?"

"Answer, anyhow."

"I like to know who I am talking to, before I go into confidences with anybody, and you'll have to unmask and let me get a look at your phiz."

"What do you take us for?"

"From your appearance, for a band of cut throats."

"Curse your impudence! But, if you won't answer, we'll take it that our suspicion was right, and you must die."

"What did you suspect?"

"That you are a spy, come here for the purpose of hunting us down!"

"Then you are away off, for I didn't come here with any such intent. Never heard of you, that I'm aware of. What do you call yourselves, anyhow?"

"You are asking too much, now. But, there is just the bare chance that we are mistaken, and we are willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, if you will do just what we direct."

"And what's that?"

"Take oath that you will never mention this night's adventure, and then take passage straight for the East by the next train, and never set foot in this town again. Do that, and we'll believe you."

"But, suppose I fooled you?"

"We'll take care of that. A man will follow you, and at the first sign of playing us false, you will be gathered to your fathers—so to say."

There was grim humor in this.

"And if I refuse?"

"You die here and now."

"Then it's hoss sense not to refuse."

"You are right. Are you willing to take the oath and do as we say?"

"I want some time to think about it. I can't desert my pard, you know, without knowing his fate."

"If you want to share his fate, it is only a step. We have another victim on hand now, and if you are anxious we will send you right along with him. We only offer you a chance for your life out of pity."

"I want a little time to think about it."

"All right; we'll give you twenty-four hours, here in this doorless room, and at the end of that time I guess you will accept anything."

Here was a respite that young Deadwood Dick, Jr., was glad to accept.

It has not been thought necessary to inform the posted reader that this Magic Mose, of our story, was no other than the redoubtable Richard.

At this time he was entering upon that career which in after years was destined to make him the most famous detective of his day. If we have turned backward to recount some of his unrecorded adventures, it has not been without a purpose.

"I accept that offer, anyhow," Dick promptly decided.

"All right; and now you will witness something that will convince you that we mean business."

"And what's that?"

"The death of a suspected spy."

The chieftain of the maskers turned then and made a sign.

Two of the men went to one end of the room, where they opened one of the hidden doors, and a bound man was brought forth.

He was not only bound, but gagged as well, and a look of terror was in his eyes. He was a young man, not over thirty, and not by any means bad-looking, as Magic Mose decided.

He was brought forward to the center of the room.

"Well, Henry Clavering," the leader of the masked five addressed him, "you see what your prying has brought you to."

There was that in the eyes of the prisoner which plainly showed his desire to speak, so the gag was ordered to be removed from his mouth.

"Yes, curse you! Noel Namara! I see to what you have brought me," was the fierce response the prisoner immediately made. "Make sure of my death, for if I escape you this night, woe to you!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Little fear that you will escape. We will take good care that you are made dead enough. Have you any last word to leave?"

"To you, yes: God permitting, my spirit shall haunt you till you die, you wretch!"

"That does not trouble me any. Is that all?"

"I would leave a word for—"

"Well, for whom?"

"The woman I love; but, I know you would only mock me. I will not give you the chance."

"Mock you? My dear fellow, you are in no state to be mocked just now. Just as well that you do not mention names, though you have mentioned mine, for your message would not be delivered."

"I knew it well enough."

"Then there is no reason for further delay in your case."

"Proceed, if you intend killing me, and let it be done with; but, remember my oath!"

"Enough; we will delay no longer."

A sign made, two of the maskers stepped forward, and taking hold of the lamp together, both pulled down with all their combined weight.

While this was being done, and while the others of the band and Magic Mose were looking at them, the prisoner stepped to the side of Magic Mose and quickly but very distinctly whispered:

"Should you escape, avenge me! Get information to Etta Elmertine how I died and who was my slayer. I know you not, but you are my only hope. You can do nothing to save me, but you can do this. Not a word. You have heard me speak his name."

Quickly spoken, and the prisoner stepped

back to his place, just as the head member of the maskers turned.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

"Not as I would like to do, Noel Namara, be sure of that."

The chief of the band whipped out a revolver and thrust it forward, but another caught his arm.

"Don't do it!" this man cautioned.

"You are right; it would stain the floor; but I would have done it had you not stopped me. Twice he has mentioned that name—name of the person he takes me to be, by mistake."

"The person I know you to be," the prisoner maintained.

"Liar! take that, since you will have—"

He threw forward his arm and fired, but in the nick of time his arm was hit by the man who had the second before detained him, and the bullet missed its mark.

Just then the men pulling at the lamp were seen to be drawing it toward the floor, and as it came downward a great gap appeared in the floor only a few feet away, out of which came a breath of damp air.

And that was not all that came out, either. There was an eerie screech, a flapping of wings, and a bird flew up into the room, circling around for a moment at a mad rate, as if bewildered, and then it suddenly broke out in words as plainly spoken as a human could have uttered them.

"Where's Dick? Where's Dick? Pete in a fix!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MESSAGE. MOSE HAS A SCHEME.

STARTLED by the sudden appearance of this bird, and more by its startling words, the masked men fell back, for the instant, in dismay.

The trap in the floor having been opened, the two men who had opened it had let go of the lamp-lever, the gap remaining open of its own weight, or balance, however it was worked.

"It's that cussed parrot!" exclaimed he called Namara.

"Kill the confounded thing!" cried another, and he blazed away at the parrot with his revolver.

Some of the others followed his example, and for a few seconds it was made exceedingly hot for poor Poll, who cried out with all her might:

"Sock it to 'em! Sock it to 'em!"

It was plain that the bird did not realize just what the firing meant, but was repeating, as it happened, something it had heard spoken on some other similar occasion.

Nevertheless, the men had to laugh, and so ceased firing, and the parrot flew to a distant corner and settled down.

"So, your name is *Dick*, is it?" asked the chief of the band, addressing Mose.

"My name happens to be Moses," was the reply.

"Moses what?"

"Mantell."

"Then who is this Dick the parrot calls for?"

"A pard who used to travel with the bird's master, who went by that name, I take it."

"Maybe that's straight; we won't stop to question it. We have business to attend to now, as you are aware. Men, take that prisoner and hurl him into this trap, headlong."

A cry escaped Henry Clavering, as we have learned his name to be, but he was seized immediately, and being pushed to the edge of the opening in the floor, was sent over, and disappeared into the dark depths below.

Immediately two of the masked men closed the opening, the lamp rising to its place near the ceiling as the gap closed.

Deadwood Dick had found it impossible to repress a shiver of horror.

"There, now you know the fate of your pard," observed the leader, carelessly. "And that same fate is likely to be yours."

"I'm not anxious for it," responded Dick.

"There is only the one chance for you."

"He hadn't ought to have even that, now," another of the masks declared.

"Why?"

"He now knows too much."

"That's so; but, he could never find his way here again."

"But, he has heard a name mentioned."

"That amounts to nothing; the person whose name it is does not know of this secret place, and it would do him little good if he did."

"Then you are going to leave him here?"

"Yes, we'll keep him over, anyhow."

"All right; nothing to say."

"You don't approve of it?"

"No, I don't."

"What would you do?"

"Send him after the other."

There was a pause, and one which was not at all pleasant to Deadwood Dick.

The chief of the maskers was thinking, and Dick's fate trembled in the balance for a few seconds.

"No, we'll let him stay here," came the final decision at last. "He'll keep all right, and we'll have more time to think about his case. Put out the light, and we'll go."

"Hold on a minute," Magic Mose now spoke up.

"Well, what is it?"

"Won't you leave me with my hands free?"

"What for?"

"It's a bad fix to be in for twenty-four hours, bound up this way."

They had bound him just before bringing the other prisoner into the room, as should have been mentioned.

"Well, that's so, seeing that there is no possible chance for you to get out of here. You were only bound to keep you from trying any foolishness in the way of rescuing the other prisoner."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Dick. "A fine figure I would cut at that, against five of you."

"We didn't know what you might try. Release him, men."

This was done.

"And now, out with the light, and we'll go. There will be two absent when the breakfast horn blows in the morning, at that little hotel."

"And one more somewhere else."

"Yes, that's so; right you are. But, come along."

The light was put out, and Dick heard them move away toward one corner of the strange room.

All was silence for a moment; then a clicking was heard, then the closing of what seemed a muffled door, and darkness and silence reigned.

Magic Mose waited a time before he ventured to speak, for it was his intention to call the parrot to him as soon as he thought it prudent to do so, but while he waited his thoughts ran freely.

"Well, this is a deuced fine fix to be in," he mused. "Seems to me it is pretty early in the game to get in a box of this kind. And how am I going to get out of it? That's the sticker. Poor Pete! I guess it's all up with him, for the fact that Poll came out of that hole is proof that he went down there."

It was more than he had looked for, so soon after his arrival in Deming.

"It's a wonder Poll didn't give warning when these fellows entered the room the first time," he mused further. "Don't see how it was she didn't squawk out at them. But, maybe she was in Pete's pocket, where she likes to sleep. I'll never know, but I do not care; she is here now, and I must call her

just as soon as I think I have waited long enough."

He waited a considerable time longer, to make sure he was alone in the room and that none of the five had remained there, listening attentively.

Then he bethought him to lie down and listen over the trap to find whether he could hear any sounds from below.

This he did, but all was still.

He got up, and was about to speak to the parrot, when Poll sung out:

"This beats shoel!"

Dick had to laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! You are right it does, Poll!" he spoke. "We are in a pickle, and no mistake. But, where's Pete?"

"Pete gone to Jericho! ha ha!"

"Sh!" was the caution. "You mustn't chatter in that way, Poll! Did you leave Pete down there in that hole?"

"Pete in a hole, you bet!"

"I guess he is, too, for a fact. Is Pete dead?"

"Poor Pete! Poor Pete! Pete dead! Polly want cracker! Want booze!"

Polly had been coming in the direction of Dick's voice while they were talking, and now he heard the hopping over the floor.

"Come on, Poll; come on, old girl; here I am, right this way."

"Poll comin', you bet! Polly want booze! Polly want cake!"

The bird was now at his feet, and taking it up he fondled it a moment and was about to place it on his shoulder when he felt something under its wing.

"A note from Pete, by the Royal Harry!" he exclaimed.

He did not remove it yet, being in total darkness, but set his mind at work to see how he could make a light.

"If I've got matches I'm all right," he said to himself, as he placed the parrot on his shoulder and proceeded to feel. "Yes, here they are, and we're all hunk, Poll!"

He lighted a match on the floor, and with it lighted the lamp.

"There, that's a heap better, Poll," he remarked, cheerily. "Now let's see what Pete has to say."

Lifting Poll from his shoulder he looked under her wings, and, sure enough a note was secured there, as he had guessed.

Quickly removing it, he read:

"DEAR DICK:—

"I am gone up this time. No use trying to help me out, I guess. Worse fix than that up at Devil's Gulch. You had better get out of Deming with a whole skin while you can. It's all up with me. Don't suppose Poll will ever reach you, but if she does, this will tell you my fate. I write in the dark, and don't believe you can make it out, but it don't matter.

"Yonr Pard, PETE."

"It don't matter, eh? We'll see about that, Pard Peter. You did get out, didn't you, Poll? And we know Pete is alive, or was when he wrote this, anyhow, and we know where to look for him. We're going to have him out, Polly, or we are going to bust a button trying."

"Ha, ha! You bet! You bet!"

Mose reached up and burned the note over the flame of the lamp, and that done he sat down on the floor to think.

He would like to open that trap in the floor, but that was impossible. It had taken the combined weight of two men to open it before, and they had known it to be impossible for him to open it unaided.

But *was* it so?

An idea had come to him.

He got up and took the lamp out of the bow that held it, and took a good look at the whole thing, noting that it was attached to a bar that ran up into and through the ceiling.

"I'll see about that, presently," he de-

cided. "I'll take a look around here first. No use getting into worse trouble till I see just how bad off I am now. There may be a loop somewhere by which I can get out. That's hardly likely, though, I suppose."

Carrying the lamp, he went over to the side on the right, and began a careful examination of the whole wall.

It was laid out in panels, every one of which looked as if it might be opened, but on trying them every one seemed to be perfectly solid.

Magic Mose was well aware that some of them did open, of course, but it was next to impossible for him to tell which one; so, finally, when he had made the complete circuit of the room, he had to give that idea up.

"That settles it," he decided. "But, that rope, that will come in handy, if I can carry out my idea; I must have that."

"You bet!" chipped in Polly.

He had passed a rather long rope, lying coiled near one corner of the room, and he went back and got it.

In one end was a hook, and it was knotted at equal distances the entire length of it, and had the appearance of having been used for climbing purposes.

"This means something," Dick told himself, as he examined it. "Wouldn't wonder a bit if this is used to climb down into that hole, when it is necessary for the Black Masks to go down."

Going back to where the lamp belonged, he deposited rope and lamp on the floor and prepared to put to the test the idea that had come to him.

As said, the ceiling of the room was low, so it was easy for him to take hold of the lamp bracket.

This he did, and tested its strength.

He could not move it any more than he might have moved the house—if he was under a house, which he could not be sure about. But, that was his scheme.

Swinging clear from the floor, he drew up his legs, passed them through the bow, and by sheer strength of muscle, raised his body in that way until his shoulders lay on the bottom of the lamp frame.

His feet were now pressing the ceiling, with his knees greatly bent, and when he had taken a long breath he exerted his strength, a little at first, but gradually increasing until at last every muscle was at high tension.

A little more, and yet a little more, and he felt something move, and as quickly as he felt that, he added all the power he had in reserve.

Slowly he straightened his body, slowly his head neared the floor, until at last it became more easy, he came down faster, and then the thing came to a stop and he turned over and alighted upon his feet. The gap in the floor was open!

CHAPTER V.

THE PROVERBIAL PECK OF TROUBLE

"BULLY boy!" cried Poll Parrot. "Dick bully boy!"

"You bet your life we are going to get there, you feathered imp!" Dick gladly responded. "But let up on Dick. Dick's gone! Call me Mose!"

"Call Mose! Call Mose! Dick's gone! Where are you, Mose? Mose son-of-a-gun! Ha-ha!"

"Stop!" ordered Magic Mose, laughing in spite of himself. "No swearing. Pete wring Poll's neck if she swears!"

"Ha-ha!" croaked the bird, and forthwith it took its place on Dick's shoulder again; and Dick, now taking the lamp, held it over the opening and peered down.

As far down as he could see, all was inky blackness, and for all he could tell it might be the bottomless pit.

"It's a pretty dismal prospect, Poll," he

remarked. "If you could only talk straight, and answer questions, I might get some information out of you, seeing that you have been down there."

"Polly wants booze!"

"The trouble is you do not know what you want. Where's Pete?"

"Pete gone! Pete gone to shoel! Pete? Pete? Polly wants drink!"

Magic Mose had taken up the rope, the end having the ring in it, and was now looking for a place where the ring was to be secured, for he had no doubt that he had made a correct guess concerning the rope and the use that was made of it.

Nor was he mistaken.

Lying down, and holding the lamp so that he could see well, he found a large hook under one side of the gap in the floor, and to that he at once secured the ring in the rope and flung the rope over and down.

Away it went whirling, and there was soon a jerk upon the hook showing that it was at full length.

"Now, Poll, down we go," said Mose, decidedly.

He wanted to take the lamp with him, but did not see just how he could manage it, so he returned it to its place in the bracket, or hoop, and put it out.

That done, he felt his way to the opening, and finding it, took a firm grip on the rope.

"Now, Poll," he said, "hold fast!"

"You bet!" the response, with a queer chuckle.

He slipped over, and was soon safely suspended over the damp and dismal pit.

But, was he safe? He felt something slipping!

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "What's wrong? Poll, we're going down!"

And, so he was, but in a moment the downward motion ceased; there was a sudden stop, with a thud overhead.

"Ha! I see how it is," Dick said to himself. "My weight on the hook has had the effect to close the trap, Poll; that is all. I guess they will wonder how we got the trap open, when they come to look for us, won't they?"

"You bet! You bet!"

Mose now felt below for the next knot in the rope, and so proceeded carefully down into the dismal depth.

The rope was a long one, and for a time he proceeded without fear of coming to the end of it, but, finally, he began to descend with more caution, to make sure when he had reached the end.

At last this was reached, and still he had come to no bottom!

"Well, here we are," he observed.

"In a hole!" cried Poll.

"Yes, you bet."

"You bet!"

Mose now twisted the rope around one arm, and then, with the other hand, felt for a match.

This he found, and striking it on his leg, allowed it to blaze up, and by its light took a good survey of his surroundings.

Naturally, he looked downward first.

There was the gleam of water, just visible, quite a distance further below, and while he was trying to make out more, the match went out.

"I think I can improve upon this," he said to himself. "If I have got any paper, I'll light a piece and send that down on an exploring expedition. I want to know just where I am."

He twisted the end of the rope around his leg, then around his body, and finally let it pass forward in front of his left shoulder.

Now he could use both arms, to a certain extent.

Feeling in his side pocket, he found a newspaper.

"Ha! in luck!"

Tearing it in half, he produced another

match and lighted it, and as it blazed up he allowed it to drop down toward the water.

The place, as now revealed, appeared not unlike a mine-shaft, the bottom filled with water, and if it was such, the water might be ten feet deep or it might be a hundred.

Then, too, as the light reached the surface of the water, it revealed what appeared to be the body of a man, floating face downward.

Dick looked sharp, in the brief time he had, but he saw only one body.

"That may be poor Clavering," he told himself, "but I don't see anything of Pete. However, I don't believe he got into the water; reason why, he wrote that note to me, and the paper was dry."

This was good reasoning, but at the same time, if Pete Parrot had been sent down into the shaft, as Clavering had been, how had he escaped falling into the pool at the bottom?

It was a riddle, and Magic Mose had to give it up.

Twisting the remaining half of the paper into a rude torch, he lighted that and proceeded to survey the shaft upward and around.

Upward, the long, dark hole was lost in blackness, but on turning to look all around the sides Dick found an opening just behind him, as he had been hanging at first, an opening that looked like a passage.

"Ha! now I smell a mice!" he exclaimed.

"Polly want booze!"

"Hang you and booze together! We want to get out out of this fix worse than we want anything else, I guess. Yes, Poll! I smell a mice! This rope is about the right length to reach this passage, and it has been used as a ladder by which to pass up and down."

It looked as though he had struck close to the bald truth.

Having satisfied himself, he tossed the torch away, and taking a fresh hold on the rope he freed his leg and began to swing.

A couple of swings, and he struck the desired spot, and flinging out a leg he caught it over the ledge and was all right! It was but the work of a moment to wiggle along and find support independent of the rope.

He did not let the rope go, but drew the end of it in after him.

"Now begins a new chapter," he told himself. "We're crowding ahead pretty fast, Polly."

"Oh! we're having a bully time! Ha ha!"

"Sh! No shouting now! I think I'll put you in my pocket for a change."

"Polly want booze! Polly want to—"

But, Magic Mose choked the bird off and crammed it into his pocket, saying as he did so:

"I must stop your rattle for awhile; no knowing what trouble you will get me into if I don't."

Mose now lighted another match, having a good supply of them, and surveyed his new surroundings.

He was in what seemed a narrow tunnel, and it was plain that at some time or other in the past there had been a mine, or at least an effort to establish one, here where Deming now stood.

While he looked, he imagined he heard a groan.

He listened, intently, a minute.

Yes; he was not mistaken; a pronounced groan came up from the pit from which he had just escaped.

"That poor devil is alive," he said to himself. "I must get down to him, if it is possible, even at the risk of my life. Hello!" he called.

The answer was another groan, a little louder than the others.

"Who are you, and where are you?" Dick called.

"I'm in the water down here. I'm Henry Clavering. For God's sake, help me if you are human."

"I'll do it, or die trying," was Dick's spoken resolve. "Keep your nose out of the water as long as you can. I'll hustle and see if I can find a rope."

"Thank God! But, you must hurry; my neck is nearly broken."

"Why didn't you call out before?"

"I have been away from this spot; thought I saw a light this way and came back again."

"Then you can wade?"

"No, no; I have the back of my head hooked over a piece of timber. Only for that I would now be dead."

"Well, keep your grip, and I'll do my best to help you out."

"Who are you?"

"Mose Mantell, the fellow you saw and spoke to, up there in the den, before they threw you down here."

"Then they served you the same?"

"No; I came down to explore the place. But, this is waste of time. Hold fast as long as you can, and I'll get down somehow if I have to jump down. There may be another way out."

"I don't know; I fear not; don't, for the life of you, come down without a way to get back again. It will mean death for us both, if you do."

"Well, I'll see; you keep your grip and I'll do the rest."

"All right; I'll hang on like death."

Dick drew back again from the shaft, and struck another match.

"I must have light, or I can't do anything— Ha! there is a golden streak of luck, by the Royal Harry!"

At one side, near the shaft, were a number of candles in candlesticks, where they had evidently been left by the members of the masked band on the occasion of their last visit!

Lighting one of them, Dick was all right so far as light was concerned.

He looked around further, hoping he might find more rope, but none was to be seen, so he proceeded along the tunnel.

It was a dismal, reeking hole, but, having been in worse places many a time, Dick paid no heed to that; he pushed forward as fast as possible yet not put out his light.

The way sloped gently upward, and the tunnel was not straight, but the footing was good and good progress was possible.

Suddenly Dick thought he heard a noise ahead.

He stopped short, looked, listened, and as he did so he caught sight of a man away ahead along the passage.

Instantly he put out his candle, not caring to make himself a target for revolver practice, and listening a little longer, pushed cautiously forward with all the silence he could observe.

He had been looking for a rope, for he did not see how he could do anything for Henry Clavering without one, but thus far he had looked in vain; yet he hoped to come to the end of the passage ere long, and there believed he would find not only rope but other things besides.

The sounds he had heard were repeated, and were like some one trying to force a door or something similar. He listened again, but while he listened they ceased altogether, and he pushed forward.

He tried to move silently, but with his boots on, that was impossible, though the noise he made was only slight.

Suddenly his way was blocked, and a voice cried out:

"Stop! Up with yer hands, too, or by the horned hornets ef I don't drill a tunnel through ye as big as this one we ar' in! Give a 'count of yourself, mighty sudden, or I'll let drive at ye anyhow."

CHAPTER VI.

DEADWOOD DICK'S DEED OF DARING.

DEADWOOD DICK recognized the voice instantly as that of his pard, Pete Parrot,

and he made haste to make himself likewise known.

"Don't get excited about it, Peter, my pard!" he said coolly. "It's only Mose, with Poll in his pocket. How in the merry deuce did you get here, anyhow, without being killed?"

"Great hummin' liornets!" cried Pete, feeling for Dick's hand in the dark and giving it a hearty shaking. "Is et you, Mosey? How in ther tarrel did you git hyer so soon? Hev ye seen anything of Poll Parrot?"

"You bet!"

Poll answered for herself, at that moment working her head out of Dick's pocket.

"You homely old sinner," cried Dick, "didn't I just tell you that I had Poll in my pocket? What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"So ye did, boy, so ye did! but, darn me ef I wasn't so overishjoyed ter see you that I clean forgot it ther same minnit."

"Ha, ha, ha! Worse and worse, Pete. It is darker'n the shades of Egypt, here, and yet you talk about seeing me. Ha, ha, ha! But, I'll soon make that all right, pard."

"Well, I have been in a fix bad enough ter knock all ther sense out of me, anyhow, Mosey."

"I don't doubt it, Pete. There, ain't that better?"

He had lighted the candle.

"Bet your life!" cried Poll, who had climbed out of Dick's pocket, and now took her place on Pete's shoulder.

"You ar' right et's better," agreed Pete. "Ain't we jest ketchin' et hot, though, Mosey? How in ther name of wonders ar' we goin' ter git out of this hyer mess o' fix?"

"You ask me too much, Pete. But, have you seen any rope in your wanderings around here?"

"Seen a rope? How could I see anything, wi'out a light?"

"That's so; one on me."

"What do ye want wi' a rope?"

"There's another fellow in trouble back there in the pit, and we have got to help him out."

"Who is he?"

Dick told him, and gave a hasty account of himself and what had happened since their retiring to bed at the hotel.

"Et beats old sin, that's what et does," Parrot Pete averred. "Ter think we should git into all this hyer trouble ther first night we sot huff in Deming. I hev heard it was a hot place."

"And now you believe it, eh? But, let's get back again to the shaft, since there is no hope of finding a rope."

"And what ther doose will yer do without one?"

"Have to use the one that's there."

"What ar' ye talkin' about?"

"Rope."

"Well, you may know what yer mean, Mosey, but blame me ef I do, an' that's a frozen fack."

They had started back in the direction of the shaft, making all haste. And as they went along Parrot Pete told all about his own adventure and narrow escape from death.

"What do you make out of it all?" asked Dick.

"That is what I hev been tryin' ter git through my homely old head, boy."

"But, you give it up?"

"I 'most have to."

"They are a bad lot, these maskers."

"We hev no reason ter doubt et, Mosey, as I kin see."

"And, from what they said, they take it that we have come here to do them up, or somethin' like that."

"So I figger et out, but they never made a bigger mistook in all their lives, Mosey boy. We will be after 'em all ther same, though, now, ef we git out of this hole, hey?"

"I should smile."
 "You bet!" chipped in the parrot.
 They now came to the shaft, and Dick called down.

"Are you alive yet?" he asked.
 "Yes," the answer.
 "Well, keep a stiff upper lip, and we'll try to get you out."

"Have you found a rope?"
 "Yes, we've got a rope."
 "What a liar you are, Mosey," whispered Pete.

"Look out, that's a name that means fight, you know, pard," Dick warned, playfully.

"Yas, but et's so. How ther doose kin ye use this hyer rope, when et's made fast up thar at ther top, like ye told me?"

"I'll show you that."
 "I want ter see et."
 "So you shall."

Dick leaned out over the shaft, and tried to calculate its depth, and he now asked Pete for his opinion regarding it.

"How deep et aire?" Pete repeated. "By ther glint of ther light on ther water, boy, I should say et's a good thirty feet, ef et's a inch."

"That was my figure and I don't think it is any more. Now, I will climb up this rope about that many feet or a little more, to make sure of enough, and cut off a piece about the right length."

"Waal, you gum-blasted ijjit!" cried Pete Parrot.

"What's the matter?" Dick demanded.
 "What's ther matter? What in the tarnel will become o' you when you hev cut ther rope? You'll go down into the hole head-long!"

"That's a part of the plan, old pard."
 "Then you are a howlin' ijjit an' no mistook!"

Magic Mose laughed.
 "Well, suppose you hear the rest of it, old man," he suggested. "That man in the shaft has got to be saved, or he will be dead in less than half an hour, and it's for us to do it."

"I'm willin', if I kin only see how; but—"
 "Yes, we have got to do it. Now, you will hold fast to this end of the rope, and I'll climb up there and cut a piece off. *You still hold fast to it.* If you let go, or lose it, then it is all up with us. See?"

"I begin ter see, but—"
 "Then I'll hang at full length till I get a good balance, and then I'll drop straight down into the hole and take my chances of coming off with a whole neck."

"Dick, you sha'n't do et, by hornets!"
 "But, I'm going to, all the same. There's a man down there, without a ray of hope if we go back on him. Pete Parrot, *you* are not the man to go back on a man when he is in a fix like that."

"I guess I ain't got nothin' more to say, Mosey."
 "Then I'll 'mosey' at once."

With that, Dick laid hold upon the rope and swung off.

Pete Parrot held the end of it, vowing that he'd be pulled over before he would let go.

"Mr. Clavering?" Dick called down.
 "Hello?" the answer.

"Get out from under the shaft, and say when you are out of the way."

"I'm out of the way now; I'm under the edge of the shaft, where the water is broader."

"And is the shaft all clear—I mean the water under it? No sticks or timbers in the way?"

"All clear, but I think there's a dead man floating close to one side."

"And the water is deeper than you can touch?"

"Yes, a good deal."

"All right, stay just where you are, and I'll soon be there, dead or alive, I don't know which."

"You don't mean to *jump* down!"
 "No; I'll take a gentle drop and come down softly."

There was a touch of Dick's grim humor in this. His was the courage of a lion, at all times.

"Now, Pete," he said, in a lower tone to his pard, "You do your part. Hold fast to the rope, to help me out after I get down there, if I'm alive."

"I'll do et, boy, or die."
 "It will all depend on you to pull me up again, or hold the rope while I climb up. We'll both take a hand at pulling the other fellow up, then. Never say die, you know."

"Pend on me, Mosey."
 "I'm not afraid to."

Hand over hand, then, Deadwood Dick went up the rope, counting the knots in it as he passed them, and made no stop till he was sure he had rope enough behind him to reach to the bottom of the shaft.

He had left the light with Pete, at the mouth of the tunnel.

Without waiting to give himself the chance to lose courage, and without looking down, he took a good grip with one hand and with the other took his knife from his teeth, where he had placed it, opened, before starting, and cut the rope.

Down fell the part cut off, and there hung Deadwood Dick, over the frightful depth!

"Good heavens!" he heard Pete cry out.
 "What *hev* ye done, boy! Now ye *can't* git down unless ye *do* drop, an' et may mean death to ye!"

"That's all right, pard," Dick cheerfully shouted back to him. "Have you got the rope all right?"

"Yes, yes, but darn me ef—"
 "Never mind that; we'll talk about it later. Get back out of the way, now, and I'll set my lightning express loose."

He saw the light draw away from the opening, and knew he had been obeyed.

Now came the crucial test of his nerve and courage. Many another might have backed out, but not so Deadwood Dick!

Holding himself perfectly rigid, and taking a full, deep breath, he closed his eyes, stiffened every muscle, and let go his hold and shot down—down—down—!

Pete Parrot saw him pass the opening like an arrow in flight, and the next moment heard his body strike the water.

He leaned over instantly and peered down, but for some time nothing was to be seen but the dancing reflection of his light on the troubled water, and his heart was in his throat.

Meantime Dick had cut the water like a dart, and had gone down and down until it seemed as though he must be nearing the center of the earth, but he soon put out his arms to stop the downward progress, and soon felt himself rising to the surface, and presently his head popped out.

"Mosey?" he heard Pete calling.
 "Mosey?"

"Right here, pard!" he answered back; "arrived on time, all safe and sound. Not a bone broken, far as I know."

"Thank God fer that!"
 "You bet!" echoed the parrot.

"Fling down the rope, now," Dick directed. "Be sure to hold fast to it, at the same time."

"Down et goes!"

And down it came, and getting hold of it, Dick found it was long enough and to spare.

"Now, friend Clavering, where are you?" he asked.

"Right this way," the response.

Having made the rope fast to his arm, Dick swam in the direction indicated, and a few strokes brought him to the unhappy victim.

There the poor fellow was, his head thrown back as far as possible, and with it he was supporting himself on a bit of timber that

was just large enough to support him and no more.

"I'll free your hands the first thing," Dick observed, "and then you will be able to help yourself."

"Yes, do that before you dislodge me from where I am. I might sink, and that would be the last of me, in this dark hole. It was only by a miracle that I got this support."

"It looks so, that's a fact."

Dick had his knife still, and now carefully feeling, he found the cords that held the prisoner's hands and cut them.

"God bless you for your courage!" the poor fellow said, fervently. "You have done a greater thing than I would have dared to do, and I freely admit it. You must be a fellow of steel nerves."

"Oh, no; nothing of the kind; I'm a dare-devil, that's all."

Both now had hold of the rope, and swung themselves out under the shaft, and as they did so the body of the dead man floated up against them, the disturbing of the water having put it in motion.

CHAPTER VII.

TERRIBLE DISCOVERY. A STORY TOLD.

"UGH!" exclaimed Clavering, with a shiver. "That's a horrible thing!"

"You came pretty close to being the same kind of a thing yourself," observed Dick.

"Don't mention it! I shall never forget what I owe to you, bravest fellow I ever met in my life. I'll never forget the debt that can never be paid."

"Say no more about it. We are not out of the woods yet. Do you think you can climb this rope?"

"I don't know; the kink has not got out of my neck yet. It almost paralyzed me, hanging hooked over that stick the way I was."

"Well, we'll wait a minute for you to get your muscles in shape, and then your life will depend on whether you can climb the rope or not. You must not fail in the effort."

"You can bet I won't, with life at stake."
 Magic Mose now called out to Pete.

"Hello, Pete?"
 "All right up hyer," came back the response.

"You have got a good grip on the rope?"
 "Bet yer life on et, boy."

"You bet!" added Poll.
 "And you can hold it while one of us climbs out?"

"I'll do et or bu'st, Mosey. I hev got a good brace, an' I think I could hold both of ye."

"Then it is pretty certain that you can hold *one* of us. Keep your grip, now, and Mr. Clavering will make the start in a minute or two."

"All right, I'll take keer of things at this end."

"You can safely trust Pete Parrot," Dick whispered to Clavering. "But, when you climb, be as steady on the rope as possible, do not jerk."

"I understand."

Nothing more was said, and in a few moments Clavering took a firmer hold upon the rope and began his perilous ascent, moving slowly, carefully, but steadily upward, and finally he was safe.

"All right," Pete Parrot called down to Dick, joyfully. "Now, Mosey, your turn."

"All right, in a minute, Pete."

Dick had laid hold upon the floating corpse, and had been holding it beside him, not saying anything to Clavering about it, and now he took the end of the rope and made it fast around the body.

That done to his satisfaction, he began the climb.

The water was not cold, or he might have been chilled, and much the more so Claver-

ing, and Dick was in as good trim as ever in his life.

It took him but a few seconds to run up the rope, hand over hand, for he now was right on his muscle.

When he reached the mouth of the tunnel, and swung himself in, Pete grabbed his hand, giving it the heartiest kind of a shaking.

"Bless ye, pard, but I'm glad ter see ye!" he cried. "By ther howlin', hummin', hump-backed hornets! but I thought ye was a goner that time, sure enough. Blame me ef I couldn't weep tears o' joy over ye."

"Me too!" chipped in Poll.

Dick had to laugh.

"Well, don't do it, either of you," he responded. "We must pull the other fellow up now."

"The other fellow?" gasped Pete.

Clavering looked at Dick wonderingly.

"Yes; the dead man," Dick explained. "We want to have a look at him, at least, for he has undoubtedly met his death down there, at the hand of the Masks."

"You ar' right; but darn me ef I like the idee of fishin' fer dead men, not a bit I don't. But, ef you say pull him up, Mosey, up he comes. I s'pose you made him fast to t'other eend, o' course."

"Yes; not likely he could hold on himself. All together, now, and up he comes with a run."

Dick had taken care that the rope should not be lost, and had held fast to it himself when Pete let go, and now they caught hold with him and pulled.

The body was a heavy one, but there were three of them to lift it, and they had no trouble in lifting it up so far, and there it lay, limp and gruesome, face downward.

"The victim of a murder, and not a doubt about it," observed Dick. "This will count one against the Masks, Pete."

"You ar' right, boy."

"And perhaps we may recognize the face, or at any rate maybe I will be able to do so," observed Clavering, "living here at Deming."

"Just what I'm going to put to the test," said Dick. "Have you had any missing men hereabouts lately?"

"Not lately, that I have heard of."

"Then there have been some before?"

"Yes, I can recall at least two instances."

"Maybe this hole will account for them."

"It is more than possible."

"And that means it's quite probable. But, let's see what this man looks like, if his face is all right."

Three of the candles had now been lighted, instead of one, and there was, consequently, more light, and as Deadwood Dick turned the dead man's head so that the face could be seen, both he and Pete Parrot sprang back with exclamations.

"Good Harry!" cried Dick. "The man we were in search of, Pete!"

"Dave Daws! by all that's smoky!" at the same time ejaculated Parrot Pete. "This hyer is awful, Mosey!"

"Then you know the man?" asked Clavering.

"Yes," said Dick; "we came here on purpose to find him."

"Then I can give you a clue to his murderer."

"You can? Who was it?"

"The same man who sent me down into this death-hole—Noel Namara. I saw him and this man in conversation at the United States Hotel one day about a week ago."

"We had the clue, but this is a clue to the clue, so to say. The fact that he was in this old shaft proves how he came there, and the fact that you saw him talking with Namara doubly fastens the crime."

"Now there must be some understanding, right here," said Dick, in earnest.

"An understanding?"

Clavering put the question in a tone of surprise.

"Yes; we have let out something of our secret business to you, and now you must promise not to give us away."

"Give you away? Great Scott! is there not every reason why I should work in with you to bring this hound of perdition to justice? Let us work together, by all means, and you will find I'll take my share of the dangers."

"That is enough said; that is just what I would have proposed."

"Then your hand on it."

They gave their hands, around, with a pressure denoting determination, and that done, turned once again to the body.

"I must search the pockets, to see whether there is anything in them," said Dick. "Poor man! he came to a horrible fate. You can appreciate what he suffered, Mr. Clavering."

"My God! yes!"

A search of the dead man's pockets was made, but they contained nothing.

"His murderers have robbed him," Dick decided.

"You ar' right," agreed homely Pete Parrot, sadly.

"Who and what was this man, friends?" inquired Henry Clavering, showing much interest.

"Shall we take Mr. Clavering into our confidence, pard?" Deadwood Dick asked of Parrot.

"I don't see nothin' against et, Mosey," was the answer.

"If there is something secret, I don't ask to be taken into it," Clavering spoke up quickly. "I did not think when I spoke."

"You are into this fix with us, anyhow," supplemented Dick.

"Yes, and but for you would be in a worse one still, and one which I would never have got out of. You need not be afraid to trust me in any and every manner, for we must work together."

"That is the way I look at it. I'll give you an idea of our business here, while you take another pull at Pete's flask and try to get yourself together in shape."

"Yas, take another dose of ther medicine, ter warm ye up," urged Pete, extending his pocket flask.

"Me too!" sung out Poll Parrot, promptly.

"Me too! Polly wants booze! You bet! Ha, ha, ha!"

Clavering stared at the bird for a moment, then burst into a laugh, and for some moments the parrot was the subject of remarks.

"But, about this unfortunate man," Dick then set about explaining. "He is a victim of foul play, as I need not tell you. He was from Virginia City, Nevada, and came down here to invest in a mine."

"And brought money with him?" asked Clavering.

"Yes, a good many thousand dollars, carried in a rusty-looking grip."

"Then he was murdered for his money, no doubt. Was enticed here by sharpers, robbed, and killed."

"That is half the story, undoubtedly."

"Then there is more to it?"

"Yes, he was also in search of a daughter, a child by his first wife. His wife deserted him, shortly after this child was born, and took the babe with her. He had no reason to be proud of the woman, and had no trouble in procuring his divorce, when he married again."

"By his second wife he had another daughter, and only this one child, and on the death of his second wife he conceived the idea that it would be only just for him to hunt up his first child and bring the two together if possible."

"He had grown rich, you see, and desired to do what was right by both his children, if he found the first to be worthy."

"That was common justice."

"Maybe it was not so much his own doings as the urging of his other daughter, who had heard the story of her having a half-sister and desired to learn something about her."

"Be that as it may, he set about tracing up his faithless first wife, and at last locating her at Deming, or rather learned that she had lived here, but was now dead. Nothing could be learned of the child, however. Here the woman had been known as Bad Bess."

"I have heard of her," said Clavering. "She certainly was a bad one, from all accounts."

"Do you know that she is dead?"

"Yes, I happen to know that she is dead. She killed herself a couple of years ago, and I was on the coroner's jury."

"That is one point settled, then, and we know that David Daws came here on no false scent, so far as knowledge of that woman was concerned. Now, do you know anything about the daughter?"

"I do not."

"There is little likelihood that she will ever be heard of, though her half-sister at Virginia City insists that she is living, and is determined she shall be found."

"She knows what the girl's mother was?"

"Yes, knows all about it, and cares nothing for that. Since they both had the one father, she stands ready to receive her, only provided she is worthy, which again, is very doubtful."

"You are probably right, there."

"So, this dead man, with a double purpose in view, came here to Deming. He had money to invest in a mine, and at the same time wanted to learn all he could about the woman he had once called wife. But his daughter, dreading that something would happen to him, engaged me and Pete Parrot to follow after him and take care of him, or to help him if he needed help."

"Then you are detectives?"

"I am Deadwood Dick, Junior. May as well tell you the whole while we are about it."

"Dick Bristol, the fellow I have heard so much about? I am doubly glad to know you! Now I can understand something of the bravery that led you to risk your life for mine."

"Say nothing more about that, please. We had other business here, too, looking for a robber who was known to have friends here, and all together we came here all cocked and primed for action; but, the trouble has been, they have got us by the legs sooner than we expected."

"Yes, so it appears. But, about this missing girl: was there any mark by which she could be recognized? What clue was her father working on?"

"Yes, there was a mark; rather a deformity. The child had been born with a double ear on the left side of her head; a very pe—"

"My God! Is it possible—can it be possible?"

Clavering had clapped his hand to his forehead, and he leaned against the side of the tunnel for support, for the moment all but overcome.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SECRET. THE WAY OUT.

DEADWOOD DICK, JUNIOR, and homely Pete Parrot looked at the man in amazement now.

What was there in the mere explaining of the girl's deformity to affect him like this? The thought that came to Dick was that perhaps the man knew her.

"Do you know her?" he promptly asked.

"It cannot be, it cannot be; Etta—my Etta—the child of such a being as Bad Bess; my God, no!"

Dick recalled the name of the young woman to whom this man had sent by him his supposed last message, Etta Elmertine.

"Is Etta Elmertine similarly deformed?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," the answer almost gasped.

"Her left ear?"

"Yes."

Dick was silent, giving the man time to recover himself.

"But, it cannot be; I cannot—I will not believe it," Clavering repeated. "It is out of reason. Etta Elmertine is an angel, while Bad Bess—Pshaw! it is out of reason."

"Yes, it must be a mere coincidence," observed Dick, "since this lady's name is Elmertine."

Clavering's face darkened at once, and he hung his head.

"If it is her name," he spoke, as if to himself.

"Then there is some doubt about that?"

"Etta does not know who her parents were."

"That is strange, though such cases are not rare."

"Then why strange?"

"She must be well known here, and some one would be sure to know something about her life."

"Her life is as spotless and blameless as that of an angel, almost. She has been reared by people in no humble station, and is a lady."

"How came she with them?"

"She was adopted into the family at an early age."

"From whom was she taken?"

"She does not know."

"What is the name of this family?"

"Harding."

"They know all about her, certainly."

"No; they tell her they know nothing whatever, and she has to believe it."

"But, that does not make it so. You can depend on it they do know all about her, or at least something about her."

"Then I am satisfied she is not the child of Bad Bess."

"Why?"

"They would have had nothing to do with her, had she been. It is a mere coincidence, as you have said. It was folly for me to give the matter a moment's thought; and yet—"

The circumstances compelled it. Now, about this deformed ear, how is it shaped and situated?"

"It is just behind the regular ear, which can be set and in its proper place, and it hardly covered with her hair so that it is not noticeable."

The description is the same. I am inclined to believe this young woman is the us, and David Daws, the dead man before Bess," of his first wife, the woman Bad

"M"

"Why God!"

"What more do you know about her?"

"Nothing whatever. I love her, and the thought that—"

"She cannot help anything, Mr. Clavering. If she is what you describe her to be, she is still worthy of your love."

"But, the thought—"

"It may be wrong. It must be proven, you know. And even if so, and you come to know it, positively, you need never tell her—that would be the last thing you would think of doing."

"Let us not talk about it further. I cannot bear it."

"All right; we'll drop it."

"Let's take a drink!"

It was Poll Parrot who suggested this, and the trio had to laugh.

"We hev got biz to 'tend to, Poll, an' et won't pay to booze till we git et done," responded Pete.

"You bet! Polly paint town red!"

"You'll git your blame head twisted off,

ef ye don't mind out," Pete gave fair warning.

"How do you feel by this time, Mr. Clavering?" asked Dick.

"I am beginning to feel all right again. I am ready for my share of whatever is to come, now."

"Then we will make an effort to get out of here."

"What about the body?" asked Pete.

"We'll have to leave it here. Let's carry it back here and lay it along the wall where the tunnel is broader."

There was a place, a little way back, and the body was taken there and laid close to the wall, as suggested, and that done, the three, each with a candle, set forth to explore the tunnel.

When they came to the spot where Dick had encountered Pete Parrot some time before, they found a door blocked their way.

It was closed, and not only so, but securely fastened.

"How about this?" asked Dick.

"Kick'er down!" suggested Pete.

"Yes, but how is it that it is fastened on the other side, when the way of coming down into this place was through that square room?"

"That's a poser, by hornets!"

"It points to one conclusion, to my mind."

"An' what aire that?"

"There must be another way out, somewhere here, since both this and the other route fasten on the outside."

"That looks reasonable," agreed Clavering.

"And as this is the end of the tunnel, we have missed it, somewhere on the way. We must go back, making a close search as we go."

"While the candles last, too," reminded Pete.

"Oh! they are good for an hour yet," said Dick. "Then, there are a couple more back there by the shaft, you know. Come on."

"Hark!"

All listened.

"I thought I heard steps and voices," said Clavering, who had given the warning.

In a moment more such sounds were heard, unmistakably.

Men were coming down wooden steps in the direction of the door where the three escaping prisoners stood.

"Out with the lights!" whispered Deadwood Dick.

They were out in the same breath.

"And make for the shaft," he added.

"Make not a sound!" He led the way, as swiftly as possible, the others following, and they had not gone far when they heard the door open.

Several lights were seen, and the door was heard to close.

Dick, Pete and Clavering, pushed on, silently as possible, toward the shaft, but stopped when they came to the place where the tunnel slightly widened, and where they had left the body of David Daws.

"It won't do to get too near the shaft," warned Dick. "If they charged us we would be forced over."

"An' bein' unarmed, we are in a doosed bad fix," declared Pete Parrot.

"We have the weapons Nature gave us, though," spoke Clavering. "I am not afraid to trust to those to some extent."

"Neither are Pete and I, if it comes to a pinch, but they would stand little chance against bullets, you know. Here we are, though, and we have got to face the music."

"Sh! Not a word more."

So cautioned Pete, and all were silent.

The men were coming toward them, and counting the lights they found they were seven in number.

Dick Bristol was thinking rapidly, calculating all the chances and at the same time speculating concerning the destination of these men.

He did not believe their intention was to enter the shaft, for, if they were the same men who had left him in the square room above, they knew the rope had been left in that room.

No, he decided, they were not going to the shaft; and he was right.

They presently stopped, before they came near enough to discover the three men in hiding.

"Here we are," spoke the leader, and his voice was recognized as that of the chief of the Masks.

"Yes, here we are," echoed another.

"Wonder how our victim found his bath when he got down into it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! He is all right, you bet! He never knowed what was the matter with him."

"Well, open the door: we don't want to stand here."

The watchers saw one of the masked band reach high up at one side of the tunnel, and a door was heard to open.

A rope, which they had not observed, had been pulled, and a door directly overhead thus opened; and not only so, but the same machinery let down a set of steps by which to ascend.

The men passed up, one by one, till all had disappeared, when the door was closed as before and the tunnel was in darkness.

To this time Pete Parrot had been holding Poll's bill tight shut, so the bird could not speak or squawk.

He now let go his hold, and Polly immediately exclaimed:

"Oh, good Lord! Polly is a goner!"

"Guess we all thought that same, Polly!" observed Pete, in a whisper.

"There may be a chance to get out, now," said Dick. "Let's find out about it without delay."

"And if not, we must surprise these fellows and fight them when they return," proposed Clavering. "We may be able to overcome them that way."

"You are right; it's our only chance, unless perhaps we could escape through this door we now know about."

"That ain't ter be thought of," declared Pete.

"Why not?"

"If they had any other way, et ain't likely they would come down through this hyer hole, aire et?"

"Well, that's so."

"But, what ar' they doin' up thar?"

"Something they are afraid of having made known; you may depend on that."

They lighted their candles anew, and once more made their way along the tunnel to the door which had barred their progress before.

It was now found unlocked, and was easily opened.

"Ha! so far so good," cried Dick, in a low tone. "Now we'll get out of here or die in the attempt."

"You bet!" chipped in Poll.

"Suppose we lock the door and trap them," suggested Clavering.

"A good idea!" exclaimed Dick.

They had come out into something of a room, so to call it, though it was only an underground excavation.

The door was set in heavy timber-work, and on that side was a heavy swinging bar, which was pivoted in the center and, when turned, caught under a big iron hook at each end.

This was turned into position, and the door was fast!

"There, we are safe from 'em in that direction, by hornets!" cried Pete Parrot, exultingly.

Already they had surveyed the place they were in, and a flight of steps on the opposite side, leading to a trap above, showed them the way out.

They used less caution, now, and ascended the steps without trying to be silent about it. This was a mistake, as they soon learned, though it might not have made any difference anyhow.

When they pushed the trap open they found themselves in a building of some kind, or rather, in the cellar beneath a building.

Clavering, who was the last man through the trap, allowed the door to drop back to its place with considerable noise, and the next moment a door at the head of the cellar steps was opened.

"What's the matter?" a voice demanded. "What ye comin' back for?"

"We forgot something," Dick promptly answered, changing his voice. "Wait a minute there."

"Hold that parrot's nozzle, Pete," he immediately whispered to Pete. "We must fool this fellow, or we may get locked down here and not get out, after all. I'll go up and take care of him. You be ready to come to my assistance."

So saying, Dick sprung up the steps on a run, having put down his candle.

CHAPTER IX.

PRETTY LIVELY SKIRMISH.

DEADWOOD DICK hoped to reach the top of the stairs before the man looked to see who it was, but in this he did not succeed.

He was near the top when the man looked down at him, and the fellow seeing he was a man without a mask, and that he was a stranger, uttered an exclamation and made the attempt to shut the door.

A fraction of a second sooner and he would have succeeded. but, with a leap, Dick Bristol was at the top and had thrust his foot out so that the door caught it and could not be closed.

"Curse ye!" cried the fellow on the other side, "I'll fix ye, fer I know ye ain't one of us!"

With that he thrust the tube of a revolver in the crack and fired.

Dick had heard the click of the weapon as the man cocked it, and knowing what was coming, had thrown himself to one side and the bullet passed him harmlessly.

He saw the chance for a trick, and seized it.

With a groan he fell to the landing heavily, but in such a position that he could spring like a tiger.

"I thought I could do et!" the man cried, and he flung open the door, unprepared for what was to follow, and the instant the door opened Dick was at his throat.

The fellow tried to fire again, but, Dick bore him down, and seizing the hand the weapon was in, held it with the strength of a young giant.

Meantime Pete and Clavering had made a rush up the steps, and they were immediately on hand to render aid to their younger comrade in tribulations, and the guardsman was speedily overcome.

"Sock et to 'em!" yelled Poll Parrot, perched on Pete's shoulder throughout the brief scrimmage. "Sock et to 'em! Give 'em fits!"

"What d'ye mean, ye varmint, by tryin' ter shoot my pard?" demanded Pete of the prisoner. "Fer jest a pin I'd cut your ear from throat to throat, by hornets I would!"

He had jerked the man's knife out of his belt, and held its keen edge right against the fellow's windpipe.

"Carve him!" screamed Poll, now greatly excited.

Do parrots reason? It can be well argued *not*; but, they do have a way of associating their parrot talk with appropriate circumstances. The bird had no doubt at some time or other heard the same words spoken under like or similar conditions.

"I've a notion to, Polly, true as ye live," grated Pete, in a terrifying manner.

"Don't! Don't do et!" the fellow gasped.

"Let up an' I'll show ye ther way out of here, if ye will let me git away afterward."

The fellow had no mask on, having no use for it there, where he had expected to see none but the band of which he was one, and he was a man whom Dick had seen in the saloon.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," Dick proposed.

"What's that? I'll do anything fair."

"You'll do just what we say, if it comes to that; but, we are disposed to be easy with you."

"Well, what is et?"

Having bound and disarmed him, they also allowed him to get up on his feet, now.

"We want to know the secrets of this place."

"Ye can't get 'em out o' me."

"Why not?"

"I'm sworn not ter tell 'em."

"But, it will be the best thing you can do."

"Et would be the *worst* thing. Et will mean *death* ter me ef I blow out."

"An' by hornets et may mean death to ye ef ye don't!" cried Pete Parrot, with a flourish of the knife he still held in hand.

"I'll take my chances on not tellin', fer I know what et means ef I give the boys away."

"What *will* it mean?" asked Dick.

"Death, as I told ye."

Dick had hoped to betray him into letting out something that would be useful in the line of information.

It was plain this fellow had not been one of those who had cast Clavering into the shaft, or he would have shown surprise at seeing him alive and well.

"Well, keep your information to yourself, then," Dick said. "We can get along without it, for we hold the winning hand in the game now, that is sure. We have got your pards in a trap like so many rats."

He watched the man closely to see how he would take this.

The fellow smiled in a mysterious fashion.

This gave Dick the idea that maybe there was another way of escape out of the place, and that it would not be a bad idea for himself and pards to be getting out while there might yet be the chance.

"You said you would show us out of here, if we would spare you and let you go," he now reminded the prisoner.

"I hev changed my mind, though. Git out ther best way ye can."

"And take you with us?"

"I'll be a load on yer hands, ef ye do, that's all."

"We'll take chances of that, anyhow. I guess you'll be able to walk, my friend."

They had not been idle, so far as looking around their prison was concerned, and knew they were now in the rear part of some building that appeared to be a store or warehouse.

There were windows, and a door opened in the rear.

Barely had this door been opened, however, when in upon him sprung a couple of men, weapons in hand, and the foremost cried out:

"Hands up! or we'll bore you!"

"Up they are!" Dick answered, and he promptly obeyed, seeing that they meant business.

He knew not who these fellows were, but took them to be members of the same masked band.

At the same time that he put up his hands, up went his right foot also, with force, and it took the fellow fairly under the chin and sent him backward with startling suddenness.

The man behind him fired at the same moment, and Pete Parrot gave a cry and threw up his hands, falling to the floor.

"Sock et to 'em!" yelled Poll Parrot. "Give 'em glory!"

The second man was just on the point of raising his arm to fire at Clavering, when with a screech Poll flew in his face and made it so decidedly interesting for him that he dropped his weapon to defend himself from that vicious attack.

In a second Deadwood Dick had him by the throat, with a revolver—the one, or one of the pair, taken from the prisoner—at his nose.

"Surrender!" he cried. "Up with your hands, or I'll lift your roof for you, you cut-throat!"

"Sock 'et to 'em!" screamed Poll.

She flew at the man's eyes again, but Dick now ordered the bird to stop.

To his surprise she obeyed the order as if a human, and took her place on his shoulder. And she looked around for Pete.

"Poor Pete! Poor Pete!" the bird broke out. "Pete sick!"

Meanwhile the other man, the one Dick had kicked under the chin, had got upon his feet, but Clavering stood ready for him.

Clavering had caught up the weapon that had been knocked out of his grasp, and thrusting it in his face forced him to put up his hands in the same manner as his partner had his.

Pete was motionless, evidently dead.

A pool of blood had gathered around his head where he lay on the floor.

No attention could be given to him, however, until these men had been overcome and secured.

Dick lost no time in attending to his part of that work. He made the man he covered face the other way, warning him he would shoot if he tried to run, and in that position disarmed him.

Seizing him, from behind, he quickly bound his arms.

It was but a small task, then, for him and Clavering together to bind the other.

"Is your friend dead?" Clavering asked.

"I fear he is," Dick answered, sadly.

He knelt beside him.

It took but a glance to show that Pete had been struck in the head, but on feeling, Dick was glad to discover that he had been only "creased" by the bullet.

There was a mark along the side of his head, just above the ear, but the bone was not broken.

"I guess he's only stunned, after all," he gladly reported. "He will come to presently, I hope. Is there any water handy, prisoner?"

"Find et," was the surly response.

"I'll find you," Dick cried, giving the fellow a kick where he deserved it. "There will be a settling of accounts by and by."

"You are right; there will."

Dick looked around to find what he wanted, but it was not to be discovered, so he had to give it up.

Finding a rag, he wiped some of the blood from Pete's head, and another and closer examination proved that his first inference had been right, regarding the nature of the wound.

While he was so engaged, Pete opened his eyes.

"What is et, Mosey?" he asked.

"It came near being all day, or all night, with you," was the answer.

Pete put his hand to his head, and drawing it away, looked at it, and then the recollection of it all flashed upon him.

He leaped to his feet like a youth of sixteen, but staggered, and only that Dick caught him he would have fallen, for his head was weak and the hurt might be worse than he thought.

Just then a great racket was heard somewhere beneath, and loud and angry voices reached them.

The next moment came the tramp of feet on the stairs leading from the cellar.

Deadwood Dick looked to the door, and

seeing that it could be quickly fastened, sprung to it and slipped the bolt into place.

Not a second too soon, for heavy blows came against it, and angry voices demanded that the door be opened, with many an imprecation to give emphasis to the demand, and ever ready Deadwood Dick was quick to decide what to do.

"We must get out of here, Clavering," he spoke in low tones. "With Pete out of it, we don't stand a show."

"I agree with you; they are too many for us," the response.

"Then get hold of Pete with me, and we will be off."

Clavering complied, and having taken all the weapons of their three captured men, they passed out of the building.

This building, they quickly discovered, was a long one that ran well back from the street, and this partly explained why the shots had not drawn any attention.

Further toward the street was another building, and between the two was a narrow alley, through which a light in the street could be seen, and guided by this the escaped victims hurried forward.

When they had gone only a little distance they could no longer hear the cries and pounding of the men in the rear of the long store-room.

"Where to?" asked Clavering, when they were on the street.

"I don't know," said Dick. "We stopped at a small hotel, but there was where we got into trouble."

"I'll tell you what to do; come to my house."

"Gladly, if you mean it; just the thing."

"This way, then, and it will be all the better if we can get there unseen."

"You are right. They cannot be sure who we were, except myself. They will think you and Pete are at the bottom of the shaft."

They turned and passed as rapidly as possible in the direction Clavering had indicated, half supporting and half dragging Pete Parrot between them, the parrot on Dick's shoulder.

The hour was late, in fact morning, and they met no one, and at length reached their destination.

Clavering let himself in with a pass-key, and Pete was taken to a room where an effort was made to put him to bed, but he fought against that.

He would allow them to remove his coat, but not his boots by any means, so, having taken off his coat, and having bandaged his head, they laid him on the bed half dressed.

"Ef I'm goin' to die, pards," Pete said faintly. "I want ter die with my boots on. But, I reckon I'll pull through, this time. Give me a couple of guns fer company, and I'll be all right. We'll make et hot yet fer them devils, and don't yer doubt et."

CHAPTER X.

STARTLING DISCLOSURES.

WHEN they had cared for their wounded partner as well as they could, Dick and Clavering went into another room, leaving Pete asleep.

They looked back at him as they passed out, and the homely fellow, as he lay there on the bed in his striped shirt, and with his head bandaged, looked not unlike some pirate or brigand.

"Now, what is going to be done?" asked Clavering as soon as they were in the other room.

"I nominate that we finish our night's sleep, the first thing," answered Dick. "I hate to have my rest broken by trifles."

"Trifles! Great Scott!"

Dick smiled.

"Me too," chipped in the parrot.

"Yes, you too," Dick answered stroking his back.

So it was agreed, and taking the pillows from the bed they bunked on the floor and did not awaken till a servant tapped on the door.

Clavering was up in a second.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You have slept late, and I thought I would wake you, sir," the answer.

"All right, I'm glad you did. But, wait a minute, for I have friends with me and I want to give you some directions."

He opened the door and held a whispered talk with his man-servant, after which he closed the door and said to Dick:

"That will make it all right; no one is to know I am home; and good care will be taken of Pete Parrot, while you and I will be free to work."

"Good enough," agreed Dick. "I see you have got up with a clear head."

"What is to be done first?"

"Eat."

Clavering laughed and in a little time they were at the pleasant duty of the day with a keen zest.

Nothing further was said about the matter of the night until they had repaired to another room, out of the hearing of the servants.

"Now," said Dick, "we'll talk."

"I'm ready to listen."

"Then you want me to plan?"

"Yes."

"You have not forgotten our talk of last night down in that hole?"

"It has been my burning thought ever since, Dick Bristol."

"Call me Mose Mantell."

"Yes, I will remember."

"And you are eager to learn the truth concerning Miss Elmertine?"

"Yes; the truth will be better than this terrible doubt."

"And if we discover it to be as we suspect?"

"As you suspect; I can never believe it."

"Well, what if it be true?"

"My God! I cannot think of it as being true! But, if so, my life is blighted forever, for I love her—love her!"

"And you would blight hers also, if she truly loves you?"

"How could I wed her?"

"Well, let us learn the truth first, and after that face the problem. Shall we go and call upon her?"

"We will go."

"And after that we must learn all we can about Bad Bess."

"Yes, it must be done, for it will never do to let the matter remain in any doubt, now."

"Impossible to do so, Mr. Clavering. I am here for the purpose of finding the lost child of David Daws, and here is a clue that I cannot afford to throw away; in fact, it looks like certain proof."

"And would her half-sister accept her, if what you suspect proves true?"

"She would—she will, if she is such a person as you describe her to be. I am sure of this."

Clavering bowed his head.

They laid their plans as far as possible, and presently left the house, first looking in to see how Pete Parrot was.

Pete was awake, but his head troubled him so that he felt more like lying down than sitting up, and he was left there under the care of a servant, and Clavering promised him a doctor.

The distance was not far to the house of the Hardings.

Here, as they were about entering the neat yard before the house, a woman came out of the front door.

She was not a prepossessing creature by any means, but her face had a smile suggestive of triumph. At sight of her Henry Clavering gave a start.

"What means this?" he whispered.

"Who is she?" asked Dick.

"She was a companion of the dead Bad Bess."

"Hal!"

"What do you think of it?"

"I think we need not look further for proof; what is *she* doing *here*?"

"Who can say? But, I am still unwilling to believe it possible. Mind, not a word of this must reach Etta's ears."

The woman had now passed them, giving them a leering look as she did so, and gone on her way.

They advanced to the door and knocked.

It was opened by Mr. Harding whose face bore a troubled look.

"Clavering!" he exclaimed. "I am glad to see you. What has happened? You look troubled."

"I have had a night of adventure, Mr. Harding. But we will tell you about that later. Let me introduce Mr. Mantell."

The introduction was acknowledged.

"What was that woman doing here just now?" asked Clavering, then.

The man's face clouded again immediately.

"She came here to make me trouble, curse her!" he grated.

"In what way?"

"I dare not tell; she has me in her power. But, no more of this in the presence of your friend, Mr. Clavering."

"On the contrary, Mr. Harding, my friend and I must know all about it. Am I right in guessing that it has something to do with Etta's life history?"

Harding paled.

"It has," he admitted. "How came you to know the secret?"

"I do not know it; I am not willing to believe it; but my friend here insists it *must* be so."

Harding looked at Dick in amazement.

"We must talk this matter over at length, and in private, sir," said Dick.

"Very well, come right into this room, gentlemen."

They entered a cozy room, where Mr. Harding invited them to be seated, and he took a seat himself.

"Now," he said, "let us lay the skeleton bare."

"Does this woman tell you that your adopted daughter is the child of a woman, now dead, who was known as Bad Bess?" asked Dick, bluntly.

"She does; and worse, she claims she is able to prove it. She says she has papers to show, and that unless I come down with a neat sum of money she will expose the whole matter."

"And you have bought her off?"

"No; I have *put* her off, for a couple of days, while I can think about it."

"Good enough; I will take care of her in the meantime, and those papers shall not remain in her possession."

"But where does *your* interest in the matter come in, young man?"

"I am in search of the daughter of the woman known as Bad Bess."

"With what object?"

"That of restoring her to her father, or rather, now that her father is dead, to her half-sister."

"And who was her father?"

"One David Daws, of Virginia City."

"Would you be able to identify this child?"

"I would, sir."

"How?"

"Her ear, on the left side, is formed doubly."

"My God! It is true, it is true! Clavering, what in Heaven's name is to be done?"

"You are willing to believe that Etta Elmertine is the child of—of such a creature as bad Bess was?"

"I am forced to believe it."

"But there is no proof!"

"It appears to me to be overwhelming proof. Here, first, came this other woman, a companion of Bad Bess, called Moll Miggs. She declared the truth to me, and threatened to expose it unless I paid her large money. Right on top of her visit you have come, with the same information."

"Great heavens! it is more than proof."

"But, young man," to Deadwood Dick, "what is to be done?"

"Care must be taken of this woman, Moll Miggs, first of all, so that she has no chance to tell what she knows."

"You would not suggest killing her?"

Dick smiled.

"Well, hardly," he answered. "But I would get the papers she holds, and then get some hold upon her and warn her to make any disclosure if she dare."

"But, I know nothing against her that would scare her."

"It will not be hard to learn something, I imagine; her record is probably not clean, and a general threat would have the desired effect, I have no doubt. I will attend to that part of it."

"And what about the poor child?"

"She must never know the truth."

"How would you keep it from her?"

"By never letting her know who her mother was. Let that be buried out of sight. Her father was a man of honor, and has left her property that will enrich her. The truth need never come out."

Clavering was standing with bowed head.

"What say you?" asked Harding, turning to him.

"Would that they had killed me last night," the sad reply.

"Then, if this story is true, you will not marry the woman you love?"

"Would you, in my place?"

There was silence.

It was Deadwood Dick who broke it.

"One thing you must remember," he said, thoughtfully: "The mother of this young lady was not the Bad Bess who was known here, any more than the same woman was Bad Bess when she became the wife of David Daws. Her fall came a year after the birth of her child."

Clavering had looked up while Dick spoke, and when he ended, clasped his hand heartily, exclaiming:

"God bless you for what you have said. I see the matter in a new light, now. The past must be buried, and the secret sealed among ourselves."

"You are just," said Mr. Harding. "Should I throw my adopted daughter out into the street for her mother's sins? I never knew who her parents were; I love her for herself. I still love her."

A sob was heard at that instant, a door opened, and a woman staggered into the room, falling at Mr. Harding's feet.

It was his wife.

"Mary!" he gasped.

"Henry! Henry! Dare I look for mercy?"

"In Heaven's name, what do you mean? Get up, wife, get up!"

"No! no! not till you have heard my confession. I have deceived you all these years."

"Deceived me?"

"Yes, yes; I was afraid to confess to you; but, now, having heard what you said, I throw myself upon your mercy. Bad Bess, that vile woman, was my own sister!"

"My God!"

"It is true, true! I induced her to let me take her child, when I first discovered she had one, and deceiving you, I took it under the name of Elmertine, knowing well whose child it was."

"You were afraid to tell me the truth?"

"Yes, yes; though God knows that I wanted to do so. I was afraid you would throw me out upon the street, ashamed to own me longer."

"And you did it out of mercy for the in-

nocent babe who could not help its mother's downfall?"

"Yes, yes; that and that only. Will you forgive me? Will you still call me wife, knowing the truth, that that woman was my sister?"

"I will and do. Get up, Mary. Clavering, you see it is not you alone called upon to forgive. We must forget and bury this secret, and Etta must never know a word of it."

"She never shall know, through me. I will make her my wife, spite of all. Since there is no longer any doubt about the matter, I accept the truth as it is, and abide by it."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Deadwood Dick.

"You bet!"

It was Poll, who thrust her head out of Dick's pocket at that moment.

This created a diversion for a few moments, cheering up the saddened faces, and after that a little time was spent in arranging plans.

Dick and Clavering were about ready to take their leave, when a servant opened the door, a frightened look upon her face and a note in her hand, and said hastily to Mr. Harding:

"Oh! sir! Miss Etta has gone out, and she gave me this to hand to you. She seemed crazy, and I think you had better run after her."

With a look of alarm, Mr. Harding opened the note to read it.

CHAPTER XI.

THINGS GETTING TANGLED.

As Mr. Harding read the note his face paled, and he took hold of a chair for support.

His wife, filled with alarm, demanded to know what was in the message, and the others were equally anxious to learn.

"She knows all," Mr. Harding gasped. "That is to say, she heard what passed between that wicked woman and myself, and she has taken herself away, feeling that she is not worthy of our love."

"The poor child! We must find her immediately, before harm comes to her, or before she can do harm to herself. Where has she gone? Does she threaten to do away with her life? Great heavens! as if she was the only one who has to bear the shame—But, she does not know."

"She declares she will give herself to Noel Namara, no longer worthy of you, Clavering, whom she loves."

"Never!" cried Clavering. "She is an angel high above him, even yet. This is something for which she is not to be held accountable, and for which she shall not suffer. Come, Dick, and we'll save her."

"With you, with all my heart," answered Dick. "Not only for your sake, but because I must rescue her and restore her to the half-sister who is waiting to receive her with open arms. Come on."

A few words more, and the pair left the house, Mr. Harding going out a few moments later to search in another direction.

In the mean time there was excitement in Deming that morning.

A murder had been discovered.

The body of a man had been found by the early risers, lying in the street, with a knife-wound in the back.

It was not long before the man was recognized.

It was no other than Towser Terrel.

Among the first on the spot was Noel Namara, a popular man of Deming, but one whose means of support were questionable.

Now, the officers had been informed of the crime, the body had been removed, and detectives were at work in search of a clue that might lead to the arrest of the slayer.

Namara was the man who discovered this.

It was about the time when Dick and Clavering left the Harding residence.

"Look here, Sheriff Raleigh," he said to the sheriff of the county, who was on hand. "Here seems to be a trail of blood."

This Sheriff Raleigh was a man most easily described by saying that he might have been mistaken for Buffalo Bill, at first glance. He was a man of about the same build, and wore his hair and beard in similar style.

"There is a drop, sure enough, Namara," the sheriff admitted. "But, where is the next one?"

Namara looked around for some time, both up and down the street, and at last discovered another drop.

"Here it is!" he cried exultingly. "This is the way, and now we are on the right trail. Let's follow and see where it will lead us, if it don't peter out."

"Certainly, that is our duty," the sheriff agreed.

They passed slowly down the street, a few men with them who had heard their remarks, and in due time they came upon another drop of blood, proving that they were on the right track.

Thus they continued on, and the further they went the more frequent the drops became.

"We must be following a wounded man," suggested the sheriff.

"True enough. He must have had a scrimmage with Towser before he got the best of the fight and stuck him."

The truth of the matter was, they were following the trail of blood that had been left by Pete Parrot, on his way to the home of Henry Clavering.

The walking had caused Pete's head to bleed afresh, and by the time he had reached the house he was leaving a drop at every step, almost, and when the sheriff and Namara reached there they could plainly see where the trail of blood stopped.

"Henry Clavering's house, by heavens!" exclaimed Namara.

"It is, sure enough. But, you don't suppose he did the deed, do you? If he had had trouble with the fellow, and killed him, he would have told the constable."

"Maybe so," sneered Namara. "I happen to know that he and Towser were not friendly, and Clavering had threatened him, as I can prove. Of course it is nothing to me, but now it all comes to mind."

"If we find Clavering wounded, that will be proof."

"Certainly."

"Well, we'll lose no time in seeing him and finding out what this blood means, anyhow."

They ascended the steps, and the sheriff knocked.

The door was opened by Clavering's manservant, and Raleigh asked if Clavering was in.

"No, sir; he is out," the answer.

"Gone to see a doctor?" asked Namara.

"I do not know Mr. Clavering's business, sir."

"Well, we'll come in, anyhow, for I am here on business," said the sheriff. "Just show us up to his room, will you?"

The servant knew Sheriff Raleigh, of course, and could offer no objection, for he had always thought his master and the sheriff were on friendly terms.

The sheriff had been in the house many times before, and he led the way up-stairs and went straight to Clavering's own room, the door of which stood slightly ajar, and entered.

The sight that met his gaze surprised him.

Namara, entering right behind him, was still more amazed, and his face paled at sight of the man on the bed.

Two other men had entered with him.

At first the pard of Deadwood Dick was lightly asleep, but opening his eyes and seeing all these men in the room, Pete leaped.

to his feet, a revolver in each hand, and glared at them like a bandit at bay.

"What d'ye want hyer?" he demanded.

"Sheriff," and Namara pointed his finger at Pete, "that is the man you want and no mistake. He, and not Clavering, is the murderer."

"You're a liar," yelled Pete. "I ain't done no murder, and don't know nothin' about none. Who has been killed, anyhow? I kem about as close to et myself, last night, as I want to."

"And killed your man in the fight," said the sheriff.

"No, I didn't, either. Keep your distance, or by the horned hornets of the Stingtown if I don't bore somebody!"

"Do you know this man, Namara?" the sheriff asked.

"I saw him last night, in the Horn of Plenty, and his partner had a fight there with Towser Terrel."

"Who is his pard?"

"A young fellow, called Mose."

"Where is he now, sir?" to Pete.

"He has gone out, that's whar. Has that feller Towser been killed?"

"Yes, he was found dead on the street this morning, with a knife-cut in his back."

"Well, I don't know nothin' about et, that's flat."

"Where did you get hurt, then?"

"In a scrimmage, but that's all I kin tell now, till my pard is ready to let out the hull story."

"A lie on the face of it," sneered Namara. "Sheriff, we had better arrest this fellow and lock him up."

"Don't ye try et on," warned Pete. "I'll wing some of ye, ef ye do, that's all."

He had the advantage of them, and they knew it.

"Consider yourself under arrest, sir, even if you are armed and holding the fort," said the sheriff. "I will put men to guard this house. I am the sheriff of the county."

"The sheriff, aye ye? Well, then, let me tell ye that ye hev ther durndest lot of dirty cut-throats in this hyer town of any place I ever lit into. I only 'scaped wi' my life by ther skin of my teeth last night, after bein' pitched into a shaft that is somewhat under ther place."

"He's out of his head," suggested Namara.

"I ain't so fur out that I hev furgot *your* voice, anyhow!"

Pete's sharp eyes looked squarely into those of Namara, and the latter felt their power.

"It is plain that you *are* out of your head, all the same," the rascal urged. "Come on, sheriff, since we can do nothing now. We'll find Clavering, and maybe the fellow who was with this man."

"Yas, you'll find 'em, sooner or later, you kin bet," cried Pete.

The four men backed out of the room, and went down-stairs, leaving Pete Parrot in full possession.

"When did this fellow come into the house?" the sheriff asked of the servant.

"Mr. Clavering brought him in last night, sir," the answer.

"Was there any one else with him?"

"A young man."

"But they are now out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know when they will be in?"

"No, sir."

Several further questions were asked, and the sheriff and Namara took their leave.

"What do you think?" Namara asked.

"I think the fellow killed Towser; it seems plain enough; but, he will get off all right, if it was a fight, for Towser was a bad fellow and no use to this town that I know of."

"That's all true, but maybe it was murder all the same."

"I don't see how we are going to prove it."

Just then the sheriff was met by a couple of men, who appeared to be laboring under considerable excitement.

"What's up?" he quickly demanded.

"We know who killed Towser, now, sir."

"Who?"

"It was Henry Clavering."

"Ha! how do you come to know this?"

"Two men have come to the front and taken oath that they saw him do it."

"The deuce! What do these witnesses say?"

"They swear they saw Clavering steal up behind Towser and stab him, and as they were not armed, they did not dare to give the alarm. So the fellows thought they would wait till morning, when they would tell just what they had seen."

"Who are these men?"

Their names were mentioned.

"Why, Namara, you know these men well," the sheriff remarked. "I have often seen them in your company, or you in theirs."

"Yes, that's true, and all the more reason, now, why I am ready to believe them. I never knew either of them to give a false report of anything, and it isn't at all likely they would make such an accusation as this unless they were sure."

"That is the way it looks. I must find Clavering as soon as I can, and learn his side of the story. My own private opinion is that Clavering did *not* do the deed, but that these men are lying, with some object in view."

"You don't think so?"

"Yes; I don't think anything else. We'll soon see what we shall see, and the truth is bound to come out on top."

Still talking, they went off in the direction of the sheriff's office.

CHAPTER XII.

GETTING THINGS UNTANGLED.

In the mean time Deadwood Dick and Henry Clavering had not been idle.

They had gone only a short distance in company when they decided that they had business in two directions.

The woman, Moll Miggs, had to be looked after, and it was perhaps better that Clavering should find Etta Elmertine alone rather than have a third person present, if possible.

Clavering knew where to look for her, or thought he did.

Being desperate, would she not go to the home of Noel Namara, who had long been seeking her hand, and, in sheer desperation, cast her lot with his?

With all haste he went straight to Namara's house, and knocked.

Namara, he was told, was out.

"Then I must see at once the lady who is waiting for him to return," said Clavering. "I have something important to tell her."

That was the way he put it, and his ruse was successful. He was admitted, and being shown into the sitting-room, there, pale and desperate, sat Etta Elmertine, waiting.

"Etta!" he cried, as she leaped to her feet.

"Back!" she exclaimed. "Back! I say! Do not touch me, for I am not worthy. I know all, Henry Clavering."

"No, you do not know *all*, dear Etta," and Clavering advanced steadily and took hold of her shoulders, lovingly, looking in her pretty eyes. "What you heard was the basest lie ever uttered by man or woman."

"Oh! if it could only be proven!" she gasped, her heart fluttering, and her breath coming and going rapidly.

"It is proven, dearest! Truth and falsehood have come to light at the same time. I have learned who you really are. Your true name is Daws, and you are the child of an honorable man of Virginia City, Nevada."

"Then—then it was not true, what the woman declared?"

"Can you for a moment think it true, my

pet? Come, as quickly as you can, and I'll take you home. What desperate thing would you have done?"

"Oh! I do not know; I was crazed."

"Well, thank Heaven I have found you in time to save you. You have a half-sister who is eager to receive you with open arms. And the Hardings—they will be wild with grief until they see you safe again. Even had it been so bad, they would still have stood by you, for they love you as their own child."

The young woman was in tears, and leaning upon the arm of her lover, left the house with him.

The truth was kept from her, on her return home, and she was received with open arms.

With the Hardings, there was no room for reproach, even had they been inclined.

Deadwood Dick had meanwhile been looking after Miggs.

She had given her place of residence to Mr. Harding, and Dick getting the directions from him, had no trouble in finding the woman.

Moll recognized him at sight, and demanded to know what he wanted.

Dick first of all displayed a revolver, knowing he had a she tiger to deal with, and then said:

"Moll Miggs, you are my prisoner."

"Yer prisoner!"

"Just so."

"What fer?"

"Just now, for attempting to blackmail Mr. Harding."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the wretched creature laughed. "There is no blackmail about *that*, my dear."

"That is the charge, and unless you can disprove it you are likely to suffer."

"Oh, but I can prove it, not only by my own knowledge but by letters and papers I hold, as he will find out if he don't come down as I told him."

"Well, see here," in a tone more confidential: "I am here to see just what proof you have got. It wouldn't do for Mr. Harding to come himself, you know. If it is straight, then you will have him, as you say and I shall step aside."

"Oh! I know I have got him, and that's enough."

"What do you know?"

"That this gal, Etty, was the child of my crony, Bad Bess."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Why, I *know* it! She told me so herself; an' then I have got the papers, as I say. Oh! there ain't no mistake, young man."

"But, the Hardings can prove who their child is!"

"By that double left ear? Ha, ha, ha! She combs her hair so it ain't seen, but it is there jest the same. Won't it be nice, when I p'int her out to all the gals in town, and say: There goes the child of Bad Bess!"

"Oh! he wouldn't let you do that; he will give you every dollar he is worth, rather than have it known. And, if these papers are what you claim, you have a hold on him he cannot shake off. So let me see them. If they are straight, of course I can't arrest you."

"Then it was a bluff?"

"Yes; I thought I could scare you."

"Ha, ha! I guess you have found I don't scare, young man."

"Not worth a cent. If you have got a sure thing, maybe I can be of some use to you."

"You mean that?"

"Well, I like to be on the winning side, you see."

Dick had put away his revolver, now, and appeared to be friendly toward this vile woman's interests in the matter.

She got up and left the room, and in a few minutes returned with some papers in her hand, which she opened herself and

proceeded to read aloud, evidently not intending that Dick should get hold of them.

There were the marriage-certificate, of David Daws to Bessie Gannon, and some other papers, one being a written confession made by Bad Bess herself, which, however was unsigned.

"Now, there, what do you think?" the woman asked, exultingly, as she proceeded to fold the papers up again.

"I think you have everything your own way, as it is now," Dick answered. "I think you can bleed Harding to death, if you want to."

"I know I can. I'm sure of it. You can go back an' tell him so."

She had now folded all the papers, and had tied them in one packet.

"Yes, I'll do that, and I'll take these with me, too," and Dick made a sudden grab and got possession of the documents. "Now, you are my prisoner for a fact, old gal!"

The woman leaped up, with a scream, and fairly danced in her rage.

"Give 'em back to me!" she cried.

"Give 'em back to me! I'll tear your eyes out of yer head if ye don't!"

"Keep cool a moment!" urged Dick.

"You can't have the papers, and if you are going to make a fuss you will get something you don't want. Something of your record is known, my fine lady, and you will get put where the dogs won't bite you, I warn you."

"Give me them papers, cuss ye! Give 'em to me! or I'll tear out yer heart! D'ye hear what I say? Give me—"

Deadwood Dick saw a change come suddenly over the woman's face.

She stopped short, gave a gasp, and reeled, falling to the floor, and was as motionless as though dead.

He had already put the papers in his pocket, and stepping to the door he called for help, which was quick to arrive, and the woman was found to be dead indeed.

She had long been troubled with heart disease, and the excitement had been too much for her.

Dick explained, and went away, and that secret was forever buried!

He got back to the house a few minutes after the arrival there of Clavering, with the young lady, and delivered the papers to Mr. Harding, who burned them all except the marriage-certificate.

Spending as little time there as possible, Dick and Clavering retraced their way to Clavering's home.

There they were apprised of what had taken place.

"I don't understand it," said Dick.

"Nor do I, either," declared Clavering.

"It has been the work of chance, I do not doubt."

"Et was a mighty slim chance they would 'a' had ef they had laid a hand on me, an' don't ye doubt et," cried Pete Parrot. "I only wish I was able ter be out on ther trail with ye!"

"Don't you worry," said Dick. "We'll bring them up with a round turn, after awhile."

They held a consultation, and while they were about it Sheriff Raleigh came in.

"Clavering," he announced, "you are my prisoner!"

"Your prisoner, Raleigh? What for? What is the charge?"

"You are charged with having killed the man, Towser Terrel."

Clavering laughed.

"What ridiculous foolishness is this?" he demanded. "You do not mean what you say, Raleigh; you are joking."

"Never was more in earnest in my life, Clavering. Two men swear they saw you kill Terrel, and consequently there is nothing for me to do but arrest you on the charge."

"And who are these men?"

They were named.

"Two of Namara's chums, eh?"

"Is that so?" cried Deadwood Dick.

"Yes."

"Then I think I see through the whole scheme. It is a plot to put you out of the way, so Namara could have a clear field to the hand of Miss Elmertine."

"Yes, but he thought he had me out of the way, when he threw me down into that old shaft. If *this* murder was his plot, would he have taken the trouble he did to lure me into *that* trap?"

"He has made this up since he discovered your escape."

"What is all this you are talking about?" demanded the wondering sheriff.

The story was told him, in as few words as possible, and he listened to it in greatest amazement.

"By heavens, young man," he cried, addressing Dick, "you have bared one of the biggest secrets ever known around here! You have unearthed the band of outlaws known as Satan's Seven!"

"I can't swear how many they are," said Dick, "but I can vouch that they are sons of Satan, every one of them."

"And we must capture them."

"That's what I intend to do, sir."

"You?"

"Yes, and alone, if necessary."

"It won't be necessary. I'll back you with a score of men."

"Good fer you!" cried Pete Parrot. "You back my Mosey, and see ef he don't fix 'em."

A lengthy consultation was held, at the end of which the sheriff and a deputy left the house, taking with them Henry Clavering, a prisoner. But, this was only a blind, to lull the suspicions of Satan's Seven.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE snare was set with care and very quietly.

Sheriff Raleigh put his deputies and detectives to watch Noel Namara and his associates, without for a moment allowing Namara to suspect.

Dick Bristol remained out of sight for the most part during the day, so as not to rouse suspicion or interfere with the sheriff's scheme, but when night came on he was on hand for duty.

And so was Clavering, who was released as soon as Namara was known to have gone to his stronghold.

There were two known entrances to this place, and both had been watched.

One of these was through the hotel where Dick and Pete had stopped the night before, and the other was by way of the storehouse where they had effected their escape from the trap of Satan's Seven.

It was late in the evening before Namara and his band had entered these, and when all were finally in, the sheriff moved.

The attack was made through the hotel.

There arrests were made, so that no one could convey the word to Namara, and that done, the false window in the room where Dick and Pete had lodged was forced, and Dick, Raleigh, and a dozen others descended the stairs, three or four armed with axes.

When the first door was reached it was found that it could be opened without using the axes, so they were enabled to proceed without noise to the second.

This was found secured, and no noise was made till the men armed with the axes were ready to strike all together, when a few blows in quick succession opened the way into the hidden square room.

The attackers did not carry lights, for they did not want to make targets of themselves, and when they gained entrance to this room they found it in darkness. But a number of pistol-shots from the direction of the center proved that their foes were on hand.

One of the sheriff's men was hit, but was not killed.

Dick and Raleigh, with their men, returned the fire, and groans were heard from the other side.

Also was heard the moving of machinery, and soon came the thud of the closing of the trap in the floor, and all was still save the cursing and groaning of the men who had been hit.

Light was now quickly made.

On the floor lay Noel Namara, wounded, and one of his men the same, but all the others had escaped by means of the secret trap.

"Quick, men, and lend a hand at this lamp," cried Deadwood Dick. "We will have those fellows yet."

"No, by Harry, you won't!" cursed Namara, firing a shot at Dick that nearly hit the mark. "You can't open that trap again, curse you!"

Some of the sheriff's men had thrown themselves upon the man to prevent another shot.

"They are doomed, then," said Dick.

"They are sure of escape, you mean," the outlaw chief laughed.

"I say they are doomed," Dick repeated.

"That rope is thirty feet short, at least, of reaching the tunnel passage!"

"Great heavens! how do *you* know it is?"

"Because I cut it myself, to rescue Henry Clavering out of the pit into which you had thrown him."

"Ha! that is a lie, for how could you cut it and let yourself down after it was cut? That won't go down, young fellow. No, they will escape and will hunt you down to your death for this night's work."

"I tell you the truth," insisted Dick. "I cut the rope and dropped to the bottom of Death-Hole, my paid holding one end of it at the tunnel. If there is no way of opening this trap, your men are *doomed*. Ha! don't you hear them howling now? What did I tell you?"

True enough; the terrible cries of the men suspended on the rope came plainly to their ears.

"Great Heavens!" cried the chief of the band. "There is no way of opening the trap, for they have secured it, and with their weight on the rope they can never unfasten it in the world!"

"Then it is all up with them, unless *you* know of some way to save them."

"And I do not; they are doomed!"

So they were.

By this time one of the men was dead, but Namara was only slightly wounded, as was discovered, and the shock having passed off, was himself again, almost. But, he was now a prisoner.

He would reveal nothing of the secrets of the place, so Dick and the sheriff had to set about learning them without his aid.

They left the place, and the prisoner having been lodged in jail, went around to the storehouse entrance.

From there they made their way to the tunnel, and when they came to the shaft all was still. The poor victims had dropped into the dismal hole, and there was not a sound to be heard.

The work of searching for the bodies was begun, and successfully carried out. They were all recovered.

Death-Hole was thoroughly searched, and much booty was recovered, including the money that had been taken from David Daws before his murder.

The place was entirely broken up, and thoroughly destroyed.

One of the dead men proved to be the fellow whom Deadwood Dick and Pete Parrot had come in search of—the robber of whom mention was made in the preceding chapters.

It came out that Noel Namara himself had killed Towser Terrel, for the purpose of fix-

ing the crime upon Clavering, and so of getting the young man removed from the field as a rival for the hand of Etta Elmertine as Dick had guessed. Booze, the old Bum, witnessed it, but his character was such that Namara escaped hanging.

Nor could he be hanged for the other murder, that of David Daws, through some crook in the law or hitch in the jury. He escaped with a long term of years in prison; but, he vowed that he would one day be avenged upon Deadwood Dick—that neither time or eternity should cheat him of his revenge. That he would scour the world but he would find him when he had served his term.

Would that threat be carried out?

We shall see.

Henry Clavering and Etta Elmertine were wed, and Etta and her half-sister were brought together. The body of their father had been recovered and sent on to Virginia City and buried with all due respect.

The secret of Etta's birth was never made known. It was true, there was no doubting it; but in this instance the crime of the parent was not visited upon the child. The secret was buried, and it was destined never to be brought to light again.

And so we close the history of a case that helped not a little to make Deadwood Dick the terror to evil-doers which he afterward became. When it was made known there, at Deming, who he really was, the town turned out to a man in his honor, and made a jubilee, for they had heard of him before.

Pete Parrot soon recovered fully, and together with Poll, set out with Dick in quest of adventures new.

THE END.

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- 781 Ruth Redmond, the Girl Shadower.
- 686 Orlando, the Ocean Free Flag.
- 617 Ralph, the Dead-Shot Scout.
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- 495 Arizona Joe; or, The Boy Pard of Texas Jack.
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- 468 Neptune Ned, the Boy Coaster; or, Pirate in Spite.
- 462 The Sailor Boy Wanderer; or, The Born Guide.
- 446 Haphazard Harry; or, The Sea Scapegrace.
- 398 The Red Clashed Hands; or, The Boy Lieutenant.
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- 287 Lone Star, the Cowboy Captain.
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